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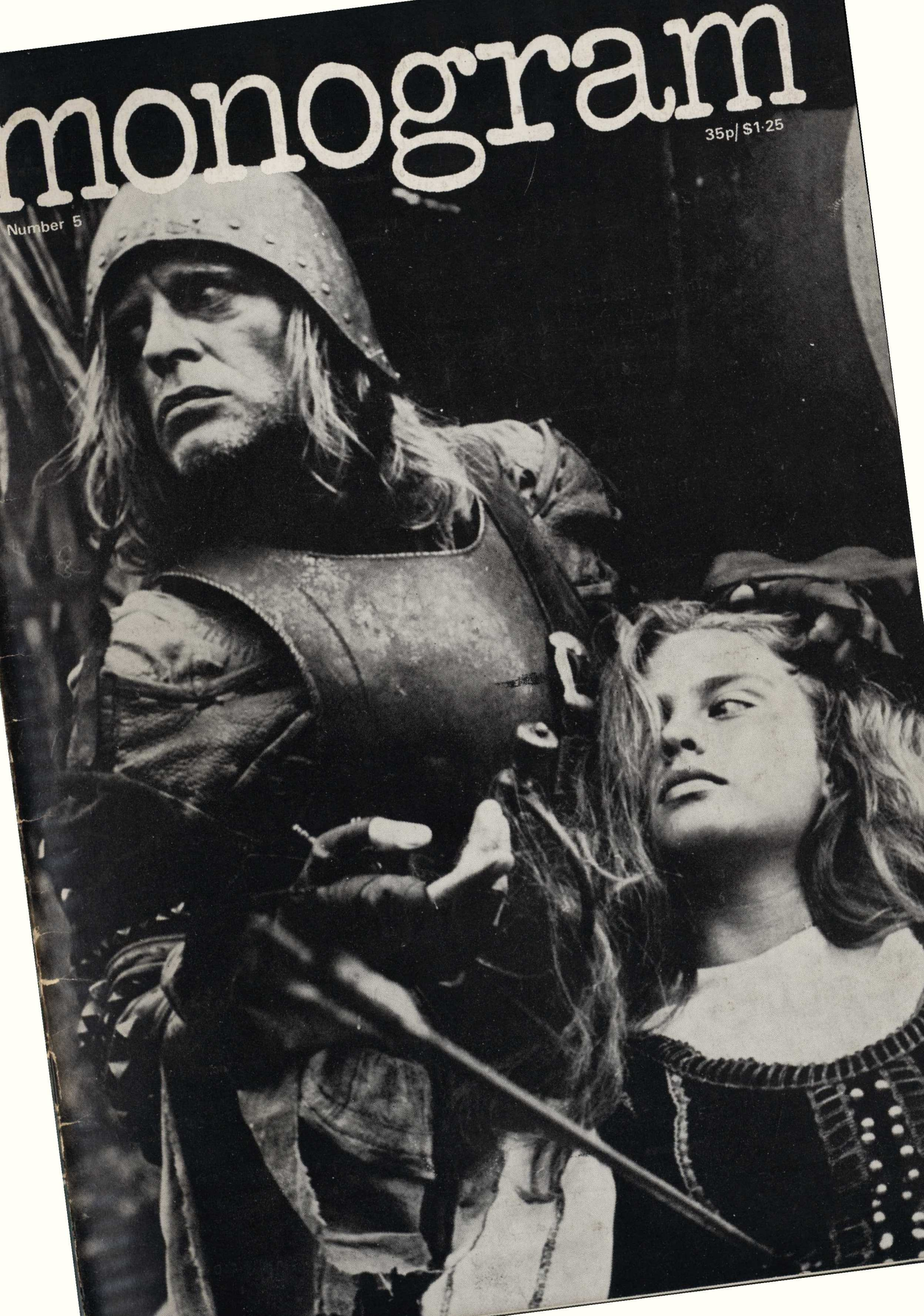

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The Cinema of Irony

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Front Cover Klaus Kinski and Helena Rojo in Werner Herzog's **Aguire: the Wrath of God**

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EDITORIAL

The Cinema of Irony

LIMITATIONS OF CLASSICAL NARRATIVE

Specific about contemporary film-making is that the distrust of the spectacle — nagging doubts about presenting as logic a purely aesthetic causality — has produced misgivings about the status and function of fictions (their ontology and their ideology: what reality and especially whose reality do they codify as verisimilitude?). Films that have any claims to truth have to battle with the difficulty or not assuming any kind of a-priori correspondence between the universe of fictionality (in which a film necessarily moves) and the world (of which it necessarily represents the external appearances). Whereas at one time this manifested itself in a self-conscious stance that owed much to the Godard of the 'sixties and reminded the spectator of just how contrived and fragile a construct he was watching, film-makers now tend to draw attention to their labour, their own intervention in the signifying and representational act by rather more indirect means; in almost all cases the stance is one of ironic 'as-if': holding the fiction at arm's length. When I say irony, it has to be understood not only in its limited sense of puncturing inflated pretensions and making assertions tongue-in-cheek, but also in a more technical sense. It names all the strategies of displacement, distanciation, detachment — verbal, visual, structural — whereby a statement, a message, a communication, image or action may be qualified, put in question, subverted, parodied or indeed wholly negated *while preserving visible that to which it refers itself ironically*. As such, irony is dialectical in intention and invariably points out a potentially significant gap or break between the signifier and the signified.

DOCUMENTARY IRONY: HERZOG

In practice, this covers a very wide range. It may be that the irony is in the plot, but carefully embedded in a *neutral delivery*, and *underplayed* to the point where it becomes a slow-burn verging on oblique ambiguity, as in the recent films of Tanner or Goretta. It may even embrace two totally opposed kinds of cinema — say, that of Werner Herzog, where the fiction (not in the form of a plot, but as a series of 'what happens if' propositions) only intermittently rises from a documentary flow — and Chabrol's cinema, where the plot foregrounds itself into almost operatic theatricality. What unites the extremes is a radical de-dramatization of naturalistic action, an intellectualization of montage which lets the image in its unmediated presence hover, as it were, over the possibilities of precise or remote signification. In the work of Herzog the scenes are dissolved into 'moments', discrete, suspended, before they become opaque and solidify into blocks, harsh and unaccommodating in their un-metaphoric, un-symbolic facticity: they are actuality material without the action. The more these moments — often extremely comic, grotesque or pathetic — are presented with the factual neutrality of the botanist, the more they charge themselves with potential meaning, that is, the less unlinear and causally deterministic is the direction of their significance within the overall structure and flow. For Herzog these moments, intensely poetic — a horse slipping off a raft in *Aguirre*, or an uprooted palm-tree catching fire in *Even Dwarfs* — are the epiphanies rewarding the film-maker when lying patiently in wait for a reality that is simply and profoundly itself — before it can be absorbed into semantically determined contexts and thus reduced to its functionality.

CHABROL AND 'EXCESSIVE' NARRATIVE

At the opposite end stands Chabrol. If Herzog is on the side of the signified and engaged in preserving its pristine irreducability, Chabrol is all on the side of the signifier, demonstrating the pervasiveness of 'language' in the realm of objects, motivations, passions and emotions. Films like *Le Boucher* or *La Décade Prodigieuse*, especially the former with its strongly linear, suspense-orientated plot, has so many carefully composed symmetrical patterns overlaying and deflecting the momentum of the story-line that one is tempted to talk about a counter-structure of visual and verbal motifs superimposing itself on the movements of the intrigue. The effect is to make the narrative more discursive, but also more explicitly an artifice. Here, as with other directors such as Skolimowski, the combination of formalism and detachment intends to apostrophize and interrogate the logic generating a visual pattern: a situation is created where the spectator can catch from the discontinuities of the narrative a glimpse of a rebus-picture of another fiction hidden in the foliage of the conventional plot.

FICTIONAL WORLDS: TANNER & ROHMER

Yet perhaps the most striking characteristic today, and one that unites an uncommonly large number of otherwise quite distinct films is the way fiction-making itself in one form or another is presented as a moral and emotional hazard, and as such is taken into the film to become the constitutive element of the intrigue, its secret theme and *raison d'être*. There, the fiction 'en abime' carves out of the material the ironic space, the reduplication, where the lines of meaning, as if traversing a prism, build up a new narrative architecture; irony, underscored or deadpan, chisels away emotion, identification. dramatic assertion or any other form of complicity between spectator, protagonists and director, to lay bare the outlines of a visual structure owing nothing to either novel or drama.

A good example of a film where the fiction-making is attributed to the protagonists is *Le Salamandre*. Tanner, by choosing as his hero a writer who wants to play the journalist-detective, sets up a mechanism inside the film which generates the action, as if by itself, almost on behalf of the director, who is free to step back and observe his clockwork-trap. The writer and his friend, in their effort to make of the girl a protagonist in *their* story, bring out in the 'subject' motivations and reactions which plainly and painfully elude any fictional pattern they attempt to impose: the girl is too real, she doesn't respect the boundaries that should separate (and protect) the teller from the tale. Tanner can let the 'reality' spill over into the 'fiction' and vice versa without apparently becoming himself guilty of the charge he levels against his heroes by an ingenious yet open-ended structure of ironic reversals and come-uppances which relativize and dissipate any fixed position. Thus, the increasing isolation of the girl in her own world of private (though socially induced) obsessive fantasy — she, too, is fiction-bound — adds another contrapuntal structure, and Tanner makes his presence felt while remaining studiously detached and 'objective'. The film-maker, engaged in a quest for the real, cannot manifest his commitment other than by emphatically disclaiming responsibility for the fiction, and pointing to the significance of his gesture by a heavy authorial silence: his irony becomes the guarantee of his sincerity, and the film, sustained by paradox, the neutral tone and a strategy of reversals, parallels and counterpoints, assumes a degree of autonomy that is clearly the product of but does not depend on a *a-priori* conception of where the film is going, or what it intends to say.

Tanner is on comparatively safe ground. His film does not push its ideology beyond the assumption that reality is a complex and relative affair, to be approached only by way of possibly self-defeating bridges thrust into the unknown. Not quite the same applies to Eric Rohmer, who also tends to place his characters in situations which make them objects of other people's designs: a relationship takes shape, out of this air, at first toyed as a pleasing conceit. The hero enters into what he takes to be the spirit of the occasion; this soon reveals an existential and moral basechord. It insinuates itself as a veritable obsession, and he has no other choice than to step into the role held out with teasing ingenuousness by his female antagonist. The challenge accepted, he comes dangerously near to losing his balance, but just scrapes through back to the status quo, but characteristically on terms that make his a pyrrhic victory, leaving him and his values bare, hollow and exposed. From one moral tale to the next, Rohmer remains faithful to the pattern: *La Collectioneuse, Ma Nuit Chez Maude, Le Genou de Claire, L'Amour L'Après-Midi*. What changes is not the

constellation, nor the nature of the game, but the circumstantial forces that void the hero of his moral and emotional substance. Never, however, are these forces identified with 'reality' as such. Rohmer's strategy is to let one provocation (and being a complacent bourgeois is provocation enough) fight another; only limited, self-interested views are allowed to intersect in a discourse that does not demand of Rohmer to declare himself, because the action shapes its trajectory according to the ironic (and thus structurally satisfying) logic of the pyrrhic victory. Yet Rohmer's morality is not only a convenient device to hold the narrative in ambiguous suspension: however charming and engaging his heroes are, he does not disguise the fact that their playing games with each other is the result of moral cowardice for sure, but also of being idle, rich and blasé, which makes their gestures parables of irresponsibility and the film a run-through in each case of what kind of dissatisfaction makes the bourgeoisie flirt with change, almost accept the Pascalian wager and then in a flurry of barely suppressed hysteria, run for cover. Sophistication and elegance, finesse and esprit are, so it seems, the products of a vacuum. It is this vacuum that Rohmer's ironic aloofness reproduces on a stylistic plane, and it has to stand for the protest that the moral pessimist in him does not dare to manifest against reality as it is lived. In his aesthetic, he would probably like to think of himself as a disciple of Fritz Lang, another wily pessimist, particularly in the way he allows chance and contingency to bring about the ironic implosions on which his stories hinge. Fate (the secret architect of the plot) intervenes not on the side of fictionality to tidy up the pattern, but in order to tip the scales in favour of apparent incoherence, the accidental, the unpredictable and incommensurate. It is the hero who in his cocksureness thinks he has it all worked out. For Rohmer, too, the world is unknowable, but it needs fiction to demonstrate it.

THE BRESSONIAN HERO

By contrast, Bresson in a film like *Four Nights of A Dreamer* gives the struggle of the solipsist with his life-denying fantasies a much more sombre colour of obsession and destructive intensity, possibly because he is not willing to abandon his hero for the mechanisms of ironic detachment that can juggle opposites and come down on the side of the 'real' or the contingent *against* the hero, and thus expose to ridicule his obstinate pride, as always in Bresson the sign of a problematic but inalienable and utterly personal spirituality. For Bresson the world is not unknowable, nor are his heroes the sum-total of their own and other people's projections. His grim *avoidance of irony* in structure and tone, despite a meticulously understated narrative diction might give a clue to the impulse that lies behind treating the fictionality of life and the life-likeness of fiction in the ironic mode: it tends to divest the individual of his pretensions to an autonomous self and to dislodge an anthropomorphic, psychocentric view of reality — without thereby committing itself to any other view of reality.

All these films, however ingeniously they articulate with the fictional situation the hesitancy of their directors about its validity, do present themselves as artefacts which are self-contained structures, objects out there, even if this 'out there' plainly does not wish to be mistaken for the 'real world'. Nonetheless, they exist in their suspended realm by a logic of their own and therefore need the *presence of an audience only to recoup* their finance at the box-office.

What I mean is this: clearly, they make no direct emotional appeal towards identification, as does the classic Hollywood film whose structure is geared towards generating psychological impulses and reactions from the audience. Irony and pointedly neutral observation as a matter of course impose on the spectator a more intellectual response of cautious and wary interest as befitting an object of uncertain status and meaning. Yet however refracted and fragmented the action is terms of what is 'real' and what may be assumed to be 'in the characters heads', it is nonetheless possible to construct the outlines of an internal coherence and correspondence of parts for the films of someone like Rohmer. Even though this coherence does not denote reality, it stands as a metaphor for objective, autonomous existence, in its very density and capacity ontologically separated from the audience.

BUNUEL

Among the things that makes *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* the most interesting film in this context, is that here the audience is thought into the very structure and thereby Bunuel seems to open within the same thematic perimeter of fiction and reality the possibility of a non-idealist dialectic. He, too, attributes to his protagonists the fictions and fragments of stories and dreams that make up his film, identified as the recurrent, obsessive fantasies — some psychologically plausible, others quite oblique, of people with a masochistic, manic strain. A bourgeoisie, more and more openly disgusted with itself is waiting for a kind of apocalyptic deliverance that fails to materialize. However outrageous their behaviour, it is tolerated, because of the guilty secrets they share together, as members of the same class. In fact, most of the time, they seem like conspirators, hatching childish plots. But if they are truants from life, as it were, their cool, insolent, urbane style makes them very good company (for themselves and for us): they typify the glamorous and compelling appeal of the cinema as spectacle, and their brazen hedonism and escapism parodies that of the spectator. It is significant that Bunuel chases them onto the road, into no-man's land; their pilgrimage is not even in search of the whore that awaited the vagrants at the end of *La Voie Lactée.*

Which must leave the spectator wondering where the film is taking him. The images convey the substance of their representation (it can hardly be called a story) only by seeming to detach themselves from the screen itself; the plot breaks and peels off like flaky paint, the narrative coils up upon itself, because it always turns out to be that of a dream from which someone is trying to wake up. As it unwinds, the film is revolving around an absent centre, and it projects itself on what is unmistakeably a blank space at the horizon of the fictional world, which the spectator must eventually confront on his own, unaided, uncomforted by the director. One is tempted to say that the film has a structure that collapses unless supported by the spectators' effort to sort it out in his own mind: he is that centre and he completes the circularity of an action that has no real beginning or end.

An exemplary 'deconstruction' of fictional realism, therefore, because the empty space (psychologically) and the stretch of country road (visually) are the film's basic situations on which its fictions come to rest, but as such, these are signs that negate. The road, on which the characters shamble along or walk briskly without making any headway connotes the journey, mythical or otherwise, whereby linear narratives travel towards climax and resolution. In its desolation it functions as a reminder that dramatic action, structured plots, motivation must not be expected of a film, nor from these stranded individuals, who like unwilling survivors of Godard's cataclysmic *Weekend* are on this road creatures from another world. The cinema is not reality, and stars are not people.

DIALECTICAL CINEMA

The dialectic inaugurated by Bunuel indicates one direction in which the refusal to render a self-contained fictional world in the cinema can take the filmmaker beyond merely asserting a sceptical relativism. A rapport of productivity between spectator and film will have to replace the structures of complicity, so that the spectator's expectations, his anticipated gratifications, even where they are disappointed, frustrated in the interest of cognition that does not proceed by recognition and confirmation, returns to him as potential energy to be reinvested in the film as active labour towards the production of meaning. A cinema that intervenes through irony and discontinuity would seem the first step towards creating open structures, spaced narratives, whose value would depend on the urgency and success with which they appeal to the spectator's desire to complete a pattern and establish for himself an understanding that makes sense. In this lies his vulnerability, but also his potential productivity. By exercising it he might learn to treat fictions not as substitutes for reality, but as the means of apprehending it. If it is the case that even outside the cinema he apprehends it as a tissue of false realities and false needs, then what better way than the cinema of 'fiction' to demonstrate — and perhaps fight — the fatal logic of this process?

THOMAS ELSAESSER

The Cinema of Irony

Chabrol, Truffaut in the 1970's

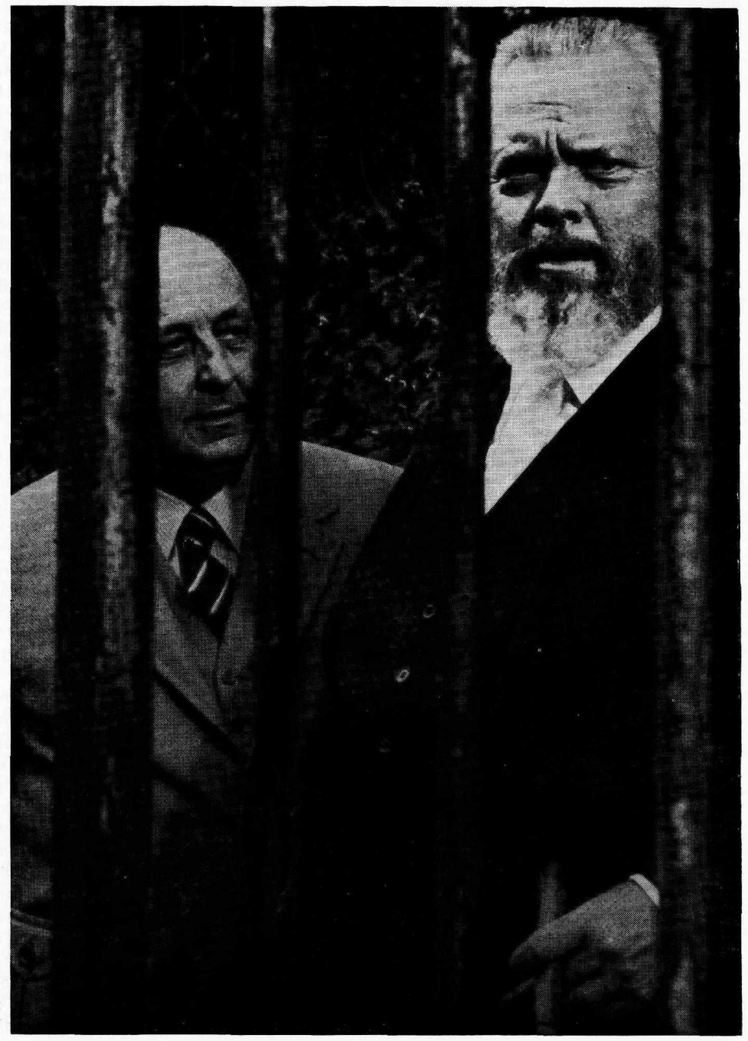
elegant games — to what end?

"I had the feeling that perhaps beneath these signs there lay something of a quite different kind which I must try to discover, some thoughts which they translated after the fashion of those hieroglyphic characters which at first one might suppose to represent only material objects. No doubt the process of decipherment was difficult, but only by accomplishing it could one arrive at whatever truth there was to read . . ."
(Proust: *Remembrance of Things Past,* XII p. 235)

Two full length feature films of Claude Chabrol, *Les Biches* and *La Femme Infidèle* were released in 1968, the first of a whole chain whose success freed Chabrol once and for all from commercial exigencies and enabled him, as far as it was possible in these matters, to function as an independent *auteur* in whose work a certain aesthetic coherence was guaranteed. On the surface these films and the films that followed — *Que La Bête Meure, Le Boucher, Juste Avant La Nuit, La Rupture, La Décade Prodigieuse* — are straightforward enough: characterisation and setting are realised in the traditional *vraisemblable,* producing a scrupulous "naturalism" available for example in the detailed observation of bourgeois family life in *La Femme Infidèle,* as, equally, the scenes of village community — weddings, shopping, funerals — in *Le Boucher.* Coupled with this is found a deference, in terms of plot, to violence, search and revenge — in short: the conventions of the thriller genre defined as the very stuff of narrative cinema, where sexual jealousy leads to murder (*La Femme Infidèle, Les Biches)* or the private citizen deprived of legal justice in a case where his son has been killed in an accident, pursues his own path of revenge *(Que La Bête Meure).*

Beyond a certain point however, the simplicity itself becomes puzzling: it is

Enclosed, exclusive worlds . . . Welles in La Decade Prodigieuse



not merely a question of the year 1968 inaugurating this cycle (to look at these films one might be forgiven for imagining the May events had never taken place). It is within the self-defined aesthetic of the films themselves that we are constantly troubled. How to explain their *immaculacy*? Is not the meticulously "beautiful" photography of Decae and Jean Rabier a trifle bland? What — if anything — lies behind that unruffled surface? These questions are complex because it has become evident that Chabrol himself poses them ironically. As a pupil of Hitchcock he invites critics to fall into the trap of searching for "significance", a too literal interpretation of his symbols (which in any event he rarely bothers to hide; their very obtrusiveness should act as caution). Thus: "of course" his films are about Appearance and Reality; in *Le Boucher*, for instance, the hero's friendly and civilised manner masks the reality of his true nature; that of a savage murderer (the neolithic caves functioning as an explicit metaphor for the "hidden reality"). But it is perfectly characteristic of Chabrol to insist on another level that Appearance and Reality coincide; in the same film what could be more obvious than to have an army butcher who has seen too much blood in his time turn out to be a psychopathic murderer? There is a suspicion — we shall come back to it — of a protracted joke at the expense of "meaning".

Appearance and Reality: the capital letters are there to suggest that the phrase functions and is familiar within a critical discourse defined as "humanist". The opposition appearance and reality is a commonplace in a certain *moral tradition* of literary criticism (familiar enough to students of university English studies) where the narrative trajectory peels away the excrescences of appearance to reveal a more authentic moral reality beneath. Such a reality is habitually absolute and fixed, functioning literally as "the truth" (about man's moral nature or whatever), and the means of presenting this reality — the writing itself or the cinematic image — are traditionally transparent and unproblematic. In literary studies F. R. Leavis has persuasively illustrated this approach and it is no accident that Robin Wood — an acknowledged admirer of Leavis — should in his book on Chabrol (1970)[1] follow this "general line", attempting throughout to recuperate Chabrol from charges of cynicism and to establish him as a moralist who wishes to "seek out new *positive* values by which to live."[2] *Le Boucher* in this light becomes a moral parable whose meaning can be gauged by a simple explication of its Hitchcockian *mise-en-scene.* On this level the film is a traditional murder drama that invites us to view the issue of blame and guilt as *complicated* and *ambivalent,* insisting again and again that "appearances are deceptive". The hero Popaul (Jean Yanne) is portrayed in a sympathetic light and the crimes he commits are for the most part placed outside the context of the film's key investigation: the relationship between Popaul and the village schoolmistress Helène (Stephane Audran). The audience is then encouraged to identify with Helène's admiration for Popaul, until the discovery of a lighter she has given him beside a brutally battered corpse shocks us into reconsidering our moral allegiance. There follows a scene (beautifully done in terms of that disturbing naturalism) in which Popaul later that night comes round to visit Helène with a present of marinated cherries. Popaul, we assume, knows nothing of Helène's suspicions and talks away in his usual charming manner as they eat the cherries, while Helène tries bitterly to hold back her tears. Popaul casually takes a cigarette and proceeds to light it with a lighter *identical to the one Helène had given him* — and the emotional tension is burst with Helène dissolving in a flood of tears. Perhaps he is not responsible for the murder after all . . .

This approach to the film (carried through of course to the point where it is revealed that Popaul *is* beyond doubt the murderer) is seen as self-explanatory, requiring no justification; Chabrol is examined as if he were Hitchcock, ignoring altogether the problem that if this is so then Chabrol's films are curiously old-fashioned: is there not a problem in making films like Hitchcock in 1972? And if the films are not mere imitations, such an approach omits the possibility of a Hitchcockian *mise-en-scene* functioning as a *mode of irony,* an artistic form aware of its own ideology. The trouble with Wood's approach is that it leads to predictable and limited results in terms of the film's 'final meaning', a reality which Wood defines as "the necessity for love", illustrated with disarming literalness: "had Helène been able to give him the love he required one feels sure that the beast in Popaul would have been cured, and the man reborn."[3] Characters are spoken of as if they had an existence outside the film: (Of Popaul) "Although his broken home background and his enforced employment as a butcher certainly laid the foundations for his mental illness, its nature — an obsession with blood — is clearly related to the experience of those years",[4] and the extent to which the medium is itself treated as transparent is suggested by a long list of options: *if* Helène could have committed herself at the cherry scene, *if* only she had done this a few seconds earlier . . .[5]

A fair amount of time has been spent on this example only to illustrate the difficulty of a literal approach to Chabrol. Nowhere do such claims for a moral commitment in Chabrol come near to the sense, in his films, of the strange and the subversive — and at the same time of the farcical. His characters, far from existing in a one to one relationship with the outside world, seem to exist in an increasingly enclosed universe; the closeted bourgeois homes protected by parks and trees of *La Femme Infidèle* and *Les Biches* have been exchanged recently for an even more baroque desolation: Theo's gabled mansion in *La Décade Prodigieuse* or the Victorian boarding-house with its hint of unexplored and mysterious rooms and corridors in *La Rupture.* The action of *Le Boucher* unfolds "loin de la cité" and what city scenes there are in Chabrol's recent films are shot — like Bertolucci's Paris in *The Conformist* or Bunuel's Toledo in *Tristana* — against a background of elegant and oldfashioned buildings, to produce the sense that time has been arrested; in *La Rupture* a journey through a vast deserted park is undertaken by tram-scenes shot in Belgium, authentic home of *"Bruges-la-morte",* the symbolist city; while everywhere the resonant cello of Pierre Jansen's musical score reinforces the insistence on separateness, on the films' discrete hermetic quality.

In *Le Boucher* any emphasis on the "psychology" of the characters is misleading for it encourages us to ignore the aspects of the film most remarkable: namely, its repeated insistence on its own fictions, a series of clues about itself asking to be considered. There is everywhere an overt visual symbolism, puzzling and ironical, as it seems to dare us by its very obviousness to offer an an "interpretation". For example, variations on the play of red and white occur in three of the key moments of the film. In the first instance, the finding of the mutilated corpse is heralded by drops of blood falling in to a child's sandwich on the school outing: while the whole scene is itself held within the larger rhythm of light (the elegance and lightness of the previous outdoor dancing scene), dark (the visit to the caves), light (the bright sun on the hillside). The second and corresponding sequence occurs just before Popaul discovers his lighter in Helène's drawer; in this scene white paint drips on the carpet from the ceiling (the red here provided by the colour of Jean Yanne's painting cap). The third and final sequence occurs at the end of the film when the lift in which the dying Popaul is taken up to the *operating theatre registers "occupé"* on a flashing red button, forcing Helène to see his life literally bleed away (the doctor announcing from the top of the stairs that he is dead).

A short close-up in each case (the bread, the carpet, the lift button) defines the correspondence explicitly. But a moment's reflection is enough to see that the whole film operates on the principle of an interlocking enmeshed clash of opposites whose basic polarity is black/white. It is a film of night and day (the schoolhouse by day filled with children, the schoolhouse by night, empty, surrounded by darkness); individual shots and scenes reproduce the confrontation; on their last evening together Popaul walks down the stairs from bright light into darkness casually registering his lack of surprise that there has been yet another murder; the stairs themselves are punctuated by darkness and light as Helène runs to close the shutters and bolt the door; finally, on the wall of the stairs hangs an abstract design showing a field of red flowing into, interlocking with, a blue design.

To look for a meaning within these symbols — symbols which are neither hidden (on the contrary) nor made to suggest anything profound; to interpret them as direct referents to the outside world, the world, in the Proust quotation, of "material objects", is to miss the point. What we notice about them above all is their extreme formality and symmetry, the wealth of variations on the stock opposition — in short, their *formal* disposition. They are signs which exist in a quasi-autonomous role, forms without meaning in a circular discourse. We are witnessing a movement away from the sign *meaning* something to a situation where the sign refers only to other signs, other fictions. What is the object of this strategy? What Chabrol is doing in effect is to suggest the ambivalence and possible poverty of the sign; he is directing his attack on the tyranny of the "signifié", that fixity of meaning and sense that is traditionally associated with a Christian or catholic discourse. Chabrol's later films offer — in the Joycean phrase — a "hesitation" of meaning, a hovering of sense in the interests of structural concerns, a deliberate separation of the real world from the "reel world". This becomes very clear in, for example, *La Décade Prodigieuse (Ten Days Wonder)* where the signs, in the form of crosses, references to Jehovah, the Garden of Eden etc., multiply to the point of absurdity — an intentional absurdity, as is made clear by the onlooker-sympathiser of Michel Piccoli, the "brilliant legal mind", patiently explaining the references at the end of the film; (a mischievousness one might add that is not wholly absent from a scene in *Le Boucher* I have already mentioned where the party of schoolchildren visit the cro-magnon caves at Tremolat. Here again the correspondence between neolithic man and the "beast beneath the surface" is too obvious to be entirely innocent. In short, the sequence functions as an extended joke, especially as when asked by Helène what cro-magnon man would be like if he were alive today, a child answers that "it would be very nice to meet him"). Examples are available from any of Chabrol's films: the obtrusive lamp illuminating every stage of Charles's (Michel Duchaussoy) quest for his son's killer in *Que La Bête Meure,* delegating him as "chosen one", an obtrusiveness which in the Christian context can only be ironical; another example would be the child's bedtime reading matter ("Les Origines des Dieux") in *La Femme Infidèle* or the Tarot pack of the three cronies or Fates, inmates of the boarding house of *La Rupture.* Here we approach the authentic feel of a Chabrol movie, never far from farce, in that ironical area obtained by playing off a conventional thriller against a deliberately inflated Christian symbolism.

We are now in a position to look again at the moral issue, the hypothesised humanist, religious message at the core of Chabrol's films. Such an interpretation could be more mistaken. Not surprisingly for a film-maker whose concerns are primarily with formal patterns, Chabrol offers as "subject matter" a section of society whose moral conduct is, precisely, *aestheticized;* a segment of society (normally the bourgeoisie) whose personal relationships, in the quest for a "fine pattern" or a "just" (i.e. aesthetically pleasing) solution, are marked solely by *hypocrisy, perversion, manipulation.* In such a society none of the moral consequences — guilt, salvation, atonement or whatever — of a traditional Christian parable can be taken at face value. What his films increasingly portray is a milieu in which crimes are committed in order to experience guilt as a personal gratification: sometimes this satisfaction is erotic, as in the earlier Chabrol movie *Landru,* where the hero is portrayed as possessing a delicate aesthetic sensibility, an appreciation of the "good things" of life whch is not at all (fine irony) contradicted by his activities as murderer of beautiful women. Again, the satisfaction may be an intellectual one, as in *La Décade Prodigieuse* where Théo (Orson Welles) sets up a whole series of crimes in order to experience the satisfaction of being unmasked — the story recalls Borges' "Death and the Compass" — by the world's "finest legal mind" (Michel Piccoli); a plan to which the fitting end can only be his own suicide. Théo's plans in the meantime have involved the destruction of his wife (played by Marlene Jobert) and adopted son (Anthony Perkins), which prompts two reflections. The first is that the *family* as the traditional focus of Christian values is everywhere in Chabrol indicted, shown up as hypocritical. Consider *La Femme Infidèle:* a man murders his wife's lover only to find a surprising complicity from his wife in the face of police investigations. As the police come for the final arrest the husband and wife reaffirm their love for each other. The husband is taken away . . . The irony here is entirely at the expense of the bourgeois family whose marriage has indeed been *consecrated* by murder; guilt is presented as a self-indulgent luxury and, far from showing us "the central importance of the family",[6] the dominating sentiments of the film are hypocrisy and prurience. The second observation is this: in a society where aesthetic considerations are uppermost, human beings will be treated as objects, to be acquired (Frédérique's predatory nature in *Les Biches:* her acquisition, by cash, of the pavement artist Why) — or discarded. Along with a *fetishism of objects,* those "spoils" of bourgeois life — cigarettes, lighters, cars, drinks, television sets — we observe a situation (a parallel here with Henry James) in which people *become* objects of art: Théo in *La Décade* dresses his wife in beautiful clothes and jewels in order that she can take her place among objects of priceless value in his collector's mansion. The sexual behaviour of the inhabitants of this world will be correspondingly perverse. Théo's "acquisition" of his wife involved him "buying" her as a child of ten from one of his tenants and marrying her as a child bride. The link between a fetishism of objects and sado-sexual behaviour is explicitly provided when he murders her by slitting her throat with a razor replacing her "lost" diamond necklace with a necklace of blood . . .

"Overdetermined" violence . . . La Rupture

Not to labour the point, Chabrol's world is one of "decadence". Let us repeat however that Chabrol's primary intention is neither to endorse nor to censure values. This is not a novel enterprise: the world he offers us, a world in which form and content so strangely mirror each other, a world of "play", complicity, games, with its perspective lacking fixity or full final meaning is the product of a certain type of European consciousness. Henry James has been mentioned; but Chabrol's "play of forms" is reminiscent also of a French literary tradition concerning itself with the decadence of ruling institutions and the values they inculcate that can be traced back through Proust and Flaubert to Stendhal and Laclos. This world is also "aesthetic', literary, *romanesque.* The characters — those dandies and ironists who people the pages of Stendhalian and Flaubertian fiction — see the options of their lives in terms of the lives of the heroes of their favourite novels. Flaubert's melancholy account of Frederic's sojourn abroad in *L'Education Sentimentale,* "Il voyagea. . . il revint", with its stress, in the clipped preterite, on a circular futility is translated by Chabrol into the circulating rack of books in the bookseller's window of an earlier film, *Les Cousins,* or the empty revolving turntable with which the film ends. The episodes which punctuate this circular journey are seen as, precisely, tableaux; frozen, stylized, demanding to be labelled: "The Brothel Scene", "The Races", "The June Days" etc. (In *Les Biches* we find the film divided into four formal segments, Prologue, Frédériue, Why, Epilogue). There is a similar insistence on the dictating power of the camera's eye — as in, for example, the pre-credits sequence of *La Femme Infidèle* where the

mother, father, child, mother-in-law self-consciously group themselves into a family pose. The grouping is demanded by dictates of elegance and symmetry while the pose suggests that the Chabrol protagonist *knows* that he is acting, that he is engaged in a game involving formidable and unscrupulous opponents (who, in the case of *Le Boucher* and *Les Biches* are also lovers). Thus we can trace in Chabrol's films a line of actors aware of the roles they are engaged in — from the parts played by Jean-Claude Brialy in *Les Cousins* and *Les Godelureaux* through the antics of *Ophelia* in which André Jocelyn plays out the tragedy of "Hamlet", to the figure of Orson Welles in the 'role' of God in *La Décade* (both *La Décade* and *La Rupture* refusing in this respect the tentative naturalism of *Le Boucher*). This is a Racinian world from which the tragedy has been extracted leaving us only with the actors — like the out-of-work tragedian in the boarding house of *La Rupture* — mouthing their lines in frenzied hyperbole; while the films circle on endlessly in a world of mirrors (from which the Orson Welles of *Lady From Shanghai* is clearly no stranger) — airtight and hermetic, scrupulously excluding the light of the "real" world.

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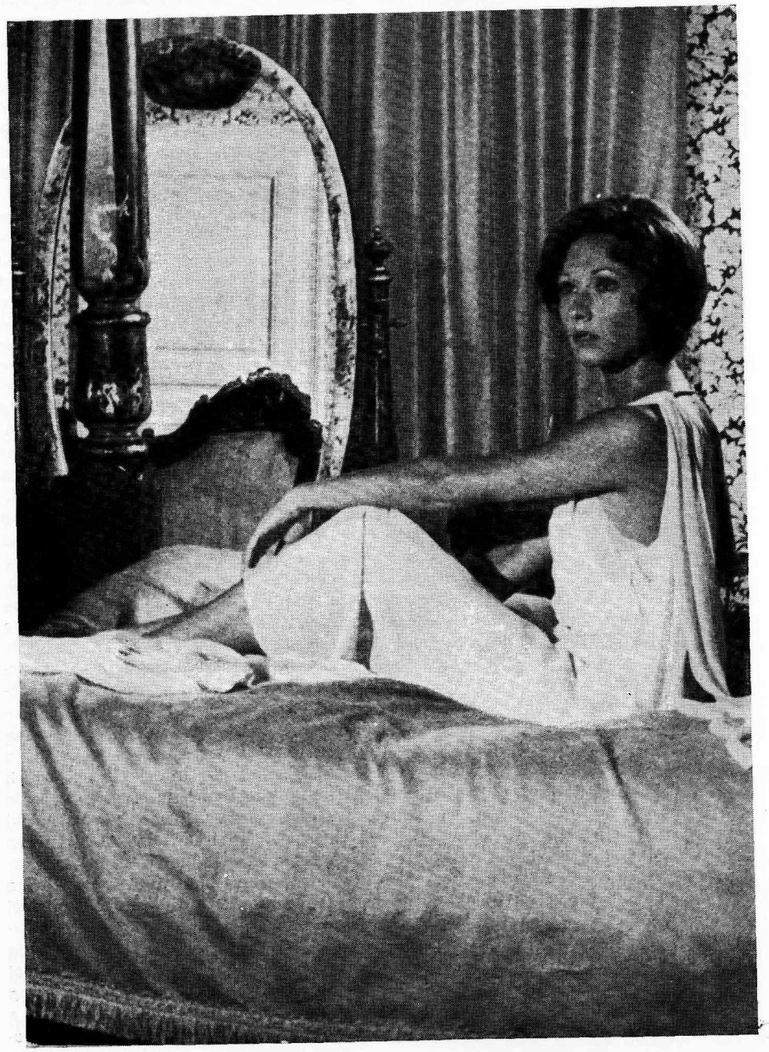
Truffaut's concerns are also for the "romanesque": it is there in the play of circulation and movement, which make his cinema a highly stylised account of journeys to and from a given place, most noticeably in the *La Ronde* circularity of *Jules et Jim* with its travelling crane shots back and forward over the mountain hut, but noticeable also in the various journeys undertaken by car, train and aeroplane in *La Peau Douce, Tirez Sur Le Pianiste* or *La Sirène du Mississippi*. It is there also in the sense in which his characters get *caught up* in incongruous or romanesque roles[7] — the Virgin Bride turned murderess (Jeanne Moreau in *The Bride Wore Black;* Catherine Deneuve in *La Sirène*) or the series of situations verging on the farcical which Antoine Doinel (Jean-Pierre Léaud) gets involved in the sentimental education Truffaut traces from *Les 400 Coups* to *Baisers Volés*. But there is a difference between Chabrol and Truffaut: Chabrol's world is self-sufficient and self-enclosing, a world of such stringent irony that the audience is in danger of being excluded altogether. Truffaut on the contrary brings us *into* the romanesque, and makes us see it in the last resort as tragic, as, precisely, a *predicament*. He says: it is the fate of men and women to mistake literature for life; this error has fatal consequences (consequences leading to death, as in the final scene of *Jules and Jim*, where the circle of fictions is dramatised in the latter stages of the film by Jeanne Moreau in the car weaving in and out of the trees — before finally breaking out at a tangent which has her drive the car straight off the end of the bridge where she plunges to her death in the river...) *Anne and Muriel (Deux Anglaises et le Continent)* is exemplary in this aspect. Here as in Chabrol the romanesque sensibility is explicitly linked to the bourgeois world of which the film is ostensibly a portrait, but unlike Chabrol, the tone of the film, puzzling as it is, is not ironical.

The insistence on the literary origins of *Anne and Muriel* is apparent from the outset where the credit sequence shows us the text of Roché's novel amended by Truffaut's observations. The film is furthermore the mirror image of a previous film, *Jules et Jim* (also from a novel by Roché) explicit references to which are made in the dialogue. The affinity of both films to the novel form is apparent once more in their attempt to trace a whole affair stretching — like the love affairs in the novels of Henry James or the Bronte sisters — over many years and linked by a distinctively literary voice-over narration. Thus the scene is set for *Anne and Muriel* with its sepia browns and explicit fade outs, to unfold like an old photograph album its story — romanesque to the last degree — of fatal attraction, doomed love and final retribution. It is a film in which sooner or later everyone is aware of a *role* that circumstance has forced on them and which they are "condemned" to play out. Initially, a rich young man Claude (Jean-Pierre Léaud) after an accident on a swing, comes to stay in Wales with the two sisters Anne (Kika Markham) and Muriel (Stacey Tendeter). Claude is content at first to fall for the more engaging Anne, who, however, tries to transfer Claude's interest on to her sister Muriel, painting an idealised figure with whom the romantic Claude must fall in love This happens in due course — with the expected unhappy consequences, for Muriel will have nothing of him. They separate for a trial period, Claude returning to Paris to become an art dealer and critic; Muriel in turn becomes a teacher of small children (the governess or village schoolmistress of innumerable Victorian novels). Anne's career turns out to be no less romanesque. Her admiration for Rodin and her Parisian *atelier* suggests that Truffaut insists that

Women as luxury furniture... Marlene Jobert in La Decade Prodigieuse



behind her sexual freedom lies a consciously assumed role, that of a representative early advocate of free love, the celebrated "emancipated Englishwoman".

Claude's love for Muriel persists (while Anne remains for a time his mistress) demanding eventually that he write a book about the whole affair, which, completed, is printed privately and entitled, an obvious cross-reference — "Jerôme et Julien". The voice over of the narrator at this point is perfectly revealing of the film's literary idiom, and requires to be kept in the original French: "Pour la première fois, Claude fut atteint profondément Lui, qui avait tant fait suffrir, découvrit la souffrance à son tour. Il sombra des jours enfermé dans l'obscurité, doutant de tout et même sa propre identité: il attendait le sommeil en répétant à voix basse; 'Je ne suis personne, je n'existe pas, je ne comprends plus rien à la vie.' Puis il trouva progressivement la guérisson par les moyens qui étaient les siens; il écrivit son premier roman, 'Jerôme et Julien'. A travers des émotions d'une femme qui aima toute sa vie deux hommes en même temps, il était aisé de reconnaitre à peine transposée l'histoire de son amour pour les deux soeurs."

But the writing of a novel is no permanent cure for characters stricken with a fatal *mal du siècle*. Anne dies of consumption, the last words on her lips echoing those of her heroine Charlotte Bronte. Claude is by now played out, betrayed as he has been all along in mistaking literature for life. In the final scenes Muriel arrives in France where they make love for the first time in a hotel bedroom. As the camera pans slowly up the bed eventually filling the screen with the scarlet bloodstained sheet, the voice over records ("c'était fait... il y avait du rouge sur son or") the symbolic difference between red and gold, the one genuine, life giving, to be grasped, the other literary, false and inauthentic. They part next day, never to meet again. "Years later" as the novels say, warned by a letter that Muriel is married and has children, Claude is walking in the gardens of the Musée Rodin and hears the voices of a party of English children; he turns, hoping perhaps to catch a glimpse of Muriel's child — and the film closes on a contrast between the haggard, grey and ageing Claude and the carefree indifference of the children.

Truffaut means us to accept the film as tragic in that it speaks of the mystification which ensues when fiction and reality are confused. Claude's history has an exemplary moral: fiction and life have no one to one correspondence. Anyone who thinks they do is condemned to live his life in a dream, mistaking the imaginary for the real at every point along the line: the moment of awaking will be traumatic, like Leo's initiation in Losey's *The Go-Between* — a film in many ways so similar to *Anne and Muriel* — and likely to mark one for life. Like Losey, too, Truffaut shares a residual fascination for that world of false forms, the *haute bourgeosie* whose Edwardian apotheosis and its subsequent shattering in the first world war Truffaut portrayed so economically in *Jules et Jim*.

The "immaculacy" of recent Truffaut, his seeming refuge in the past or the exotic (what amounts to the same) is at first glance as puzzling as the surface blandness of Chabrol. The *tone* of Truffaut — that strange mixture of lightheartedness — is difficult to pin down; difficult because the earnestness seems to lie just this side of parody, in his insistence on taking seriously, while being aware of its "ideology", the pathos or *plight* of, for example, the Victorian heroine. This becomes clear in his full-blooded treatment of the stock situation or literary cliché, his refusal to signal it out and differentiate it from other areas of the film. In *Anne and Muriel* for instance we find that Muriel's somewhat mysterious blindness is explained — in detail, she sends a letter to Claude — by the fact that since childhood she has been a *compulsive masturbator!* Likewise the very situation of Claude is a witty paradigm — as the opening shot of his falling from a swing and breaking his leg makes clear — of the fate of a young man surrounded from childhood by domineering and overprotective women (the careful emphasis placed on Claude's mother and the benignly forceful Mrs. Brown); everywhere we look in Truffaut we find a tragic situation undercut by elements of farce. (*Tirez sur le Pianiste* and *La Sirène du Mississippi* are in this respect particularly difficult to pin down, defying any genre in their unpredictable changes from light comedy to something altogether more serious.) But it would be a mistake to think that Truffaut's 'intensity' — when there — is in any sense ironic. Let me conclude by looking at two different instances of Chabrol and Truffaut's use of colour which may perhaps stand as metaphors for their respective preoccupations. *Le Boucher* makes clear that part of Chabrol's intention is to attack a fixed symbolism of colour: both *La Rupture* and *La Décade Prodigieuse* provide notable examples of primary colours heightened or alternatively drained — purples, mauves, pale greens. In *La Décade* Michel Piccoli arrives at a small country railway station to stay with Orson Welles. As he gets off the train the camera pans round almost a full circle to reveal Marlene Jobèrt alone in a bright pink dress waiting to collect him. The intensity of the dress's colour suggests immediately a rupture between the outside world, the world of Paris, Citroens, trains, and the very different world — suspended permanently in that "marvellous autumn" of 1925 — of Orson Welles. The colour signals an aspect of a world that is at once icy, bizarre and decadent, a separate world that cautions the spectator to keep his distance. Very different is the use of bright red in *Anne and Muriel;* I have already mentioned the magnificent scarlet of Muriel's blood which fills the screen; but this is a scarlet which has been picked from a previous scene in which Muriel arrives in Calais. Here, as she descends the gangway, the red bows of the boat shimmer with the light reflected from the water. The image on the screen is not merely a metaphor of reflection, one of Chabrol's multiple mirrors, but stands in its own right, suggesting by its power and warmth a reiterated emotional resonance that defines in Truffaut a certain "humanism"; it is a red that invites from the audience an "unintellectual" acceptance and complicity.

Mark Le Fanu

NOTES

1 *Claude Chabrol* by Robin Wood and Michael Walker: Studio Vista
2 ibid. p. 6
3 ibid. p. 134
4 ibid. p. 132
5 ibid. p. 138
6 ibid. p. 126
7 cf 'Truffaut' in *Brighton Film Review* no. 21

A "literary" self-consciousness... Kika Markham and J-P Léaud in Anne and Muriel.

'Objectivity' as irony: Werner Herzog's *Fata Morgana*

To confront documentary is to confront the spirit of 'objectivity' in the cinema, a spirit many thought prematurely laid by the priests of cinema-verité, the tool of exorcism being the portable cine-camera, its dogma that of spontaneity and the bland worship of the moment. As elusive as ever, the spectre continues to walk abroad. Cinema deludes precisely because of the technical precision of its representational property. Beyond this miasma of facility lies the problem of capturing the essence of those surfaces, real or artificial, that life flaunts negligently before the lens. The problem remains fundamentally identical whether the camera is focussed on a street or its sound-stage replica, thereby dismissing the fallacy that the value of documentary is merely 'objective' concentration, photographed reality. When Marker and Resnais exploded the dead monolith of Western museum culture in *Les Statues Meurent Aussi* (1953), they also re-opened the documentry debate by rejecting the enbalming function that apparently self-justifying reportage exercised on its subject, and endorsing a vital link between material and perception. The principle of that film was that, in the same way that the meaning (i.e. the resonance) of primitive African art disappeared with the rupturing of the indigenous context, so documentary divorced itself from reality through the simplistic mock-humility of this 'objective' approach. In the films and the theoretical asides of Marker, the unsung champion of the 'radical' documentary, we find the problems of cinematic objectivity posed afresh; and at the base of the discussion may be discovered the documentary's potential powers of synthesis between man and his environment. It is this synthesis that Marker constantly seeks, but not through the soft option of apparently impartial recording. In *Lettre de Siberie* (1957), he tells us: "Mais l'objectivité non plus n'est pas juste. Elle ne deforme pas la réalité ... mais elle l'arrête le temps d'un jugement, et par là la deforme quand même. Ce qui compte, c'est l'elan et la diversité." Thus Marker constructs his films through "l'association d'idées, l'allusion, le calembour optique"; statistics have their uses but only in the capacity subservient to a poetic irony as in *Description d'un Combat* (1960) when a pregnant woman is the image accompanying the commentary that Israel counts "two million inhabitants, soon three million". Of Israel, Marker says that "ce pays vous adresse d'abord des signes"; these signs become ideas via the catalyst of a meditative imagination. Marker is one of the few documentary film-makers to have realised that the camera is less the instrument of discovery than a tool imposing a fresh viewpoint; his genre of the "ciné-essai" discovers the synthesis of past and future in the present by noting the materialisation of myth and fairy-tale in the modern world (c.f. his book *Coréennes* for the finest example of this), and demonstrating continuity via the small detail, the punning image, the contrapuntal nature of the audio-visual continuum. His subjects are Peking 1955 or Cuba 1961 but they reflect eternal preoccupations in an art of the infinite. Klee makes this oblique, 'depouillé' method central to the artistic vision; "Thus the artist surveys with penetration the finished forms which nature places before him. The deeper he looks, the more readily he can extend his view from the present to the past, the more deeply he is impressed by the one essential image of Creation itself, as Genesis, rather than by the image of nature, the finished product". Talk of Creation brings me to Werner Herzog and *Fata Morgana*.

Like Marker, Herzog has rejected fact in favour of imagery, which can express universality with so much more force than the statistic. He realises that only allusion may properly express depth, that only subjectivity will intimate objective mass. And his opening image prefigures his method; the pre-credit sequence is of huge jets that land seven times in slow succession through the glittering distortion of a heat-haze. With an almost immobile camera and naked cutting, Herzog allows us to re-examine the appearance and the motion of the planes; through a 'natural' perversion of the image, and a ritualistic repetition, they become ethereal and abstract. This is precisely his idea — the re-investigation of phenomena through the media of differing contexts, the 'poetic' transposition of objects that are given a new perspective less through the investiture of meaning than the revelation of cosmic, extra-contemporary resonance. Herzog's film undoubtedly qualifies as spectacle, but its staging is not facile; its artifice is that of subtle mutation and oblique allusion. The presence of the jets at the beginning of the film is therefore redolent of a poetic structure insofar as it designates the trajectory of *Fata Morgana*; the planes are evidence of one world, but perhaps more importantly avatars of another, deriving an alternative value from precisely 'real' appearance and manifestations.

The film is divided into three parts; "Creation", over which the ghostly voice of Lotte Eisner reads from the text of an account of Genesis by the Quiche Indians of the sixteenth century, "Paradise", and the "Golden Age", both of which are accompanied by Herzog's own text, humorous in a surreal manner. "Creation" supplies in its essence the conceptual core of the film, designating, after the jets, the reasoning behind the sustained reverie of *Fata Morgana*. It opens with views of the landscapes of the Southern Sahara, which are beautiful by a kind of awe-inspiring default, reminiscent of the fluid 'time-hallucinations' round the Magnetic City in Wyndham Lewis' *The Childermass*. At first, these landscapes presented in static shots or slow pans; when this method is replaced by tracking shots, Herzog moves from the passive-descriptive to the active-perceptive. An example of what I mean is one long travelling shot, right to left, depicting the striations of the wind in huge sand-dunes left to right; the result is that the actual camera movement becomes the catalyst for an expression of abstract motion, in which it performs the functions of arbiter and participant, accompanied alternatively by choral music and a percussion-based jazz on the sound-track. Thus what Herzog has done is to replace the customary static 'objectivity' of the documentary shot, not, as Marker might have done, with an obliquely humorous visual pun, but by employing the physical movement of the camera to elicit an abstract perception. It remains abstract at this stage because the landscapes are themselves inhuman; but gradually the rhythm of the film is accelerated as the commentary announces the birth of Man. This is effected by another long travelling shot, during which the camera focusses on water in which the sky is reflected, then tilts up to the sky, then down again to the water, a simple movement that counterbalances the monolithic landscapes by expressing the dialectical interplay of elements in Creation. This is followed in immense long-shot, by the tiny figure of a man shown walking in the desert; Herzog's panning camera gradually outstrips the figure in a movement to the right that shows us the implacable monotony of the desert stretching into infinity. Perhaps this shot may be construed as a symbolic indication of Man's trajectory in the world, but it would seem to remain ambivalent in the context of the film's overall tone. A consequence of Herzog's method is that the quality of the images remains evocative rather than concrete; as with the travelling shots, the basis of that method is reverie on landscape transformed by the subtle pyrotechnic of the cinema into perception, allusion. The camera here performs the Godlike creative function, hovering over its material while the images record their own accumulation and dissipation of meaning; such ambivalence, rather than representing a refuge for the undecided director, is at the heart of the method of *Fata Morgana*. Another example; we see an Arab boy displaying his cat to the camera, with the indigence of his environment visible behind him, and in the far distance the blaze of oil-refinery wastage — what might here be suggested is a sociological bias eclipsing the universality for which I have been arguing. But Herzog has previously shown us the refinery blaze in the context of a mythological creation of Fire — are we not therefore watching the terrible exigencies of the proper Creation? A sociological point is thus made and yet also dissolved into its obverse — that sense of infinity which is the reward of Herzog's documentary faithfulness and the rigour of his framing; doctrinaire naturalism transforms itself into a vision of the world.

This rhythm of Creation, this accumulation and dissipation of the harmony of meaning, is emphasised by the events of the commentary. Things have gone wrong; the Creator must revoke his creations, who have not adapted sufficiently to their environment. Herzog tracks past the debri of survival — houses constructed from automobile hulks and jet-wreckage; his hand-held camera stalks through the rotted carcases of animals. "Creation" ends with the first appearance of a 'sign' (in the sense of Marker) which will be transformed by Herzog's editing into the abstract expression of the ambivalence he finds; a mysterious object moving through an intense heat-haze (perhaps the crew's VW bus gadding about under orders). But a primary affirmation of movement? Or even Lewis' 'nodal obscenity'?

An old blind man, his chest pinned with medals, is led out from the shadow of a cave by a young girl with a transistor slung around her neck; the old man speaks harshly, the girl seems bored — Herzog gives us a close-up of the medals, as if in mock reverence. Thus "Paradise" begins, and with it the resumption of vivid imagery whose import is decidedly unclear. Nevertheless, Herzog is clearly interested in a more exclusively human sphere, after the tentative existence of "Creation", given that the period behind "Creation" (the deliberately distanced abstract tone exemplified by the commentary and the landscapes, and the consequently necessary ambivalence and relative sense of meaning engendered) dominates the remaining sections of the film. "In Paradise, the plane wrecks are distributed beforehand"; once again, adaptation entails the presence of dereliction, and to a long tracking shot of a native settlement, Herzog adds the oblique punctuation of more animal carcases. Another long tracking-shot, of what appears to be a military storage depot, is accompanied by the sinister drone of Leonard Cohen on the sound-track. The dubious appearances of this depressing environment are carried over into "Paradise"; in place of the jets, a silver bus moves through the heat-haze liken an insect. But Herzog seems most interested in the strange humanity that he encounters. Old men wearing huge protuberant goggles squat in the sand slaking lime and chipping stone; these goggles (which are also worn by the dwarfs in *Even Dwarfs Started Small*) became the vehicle of Herzog's ironic 'interference' with reality — even though they are conceivably necessary to combat the glare of the sun. Functioning within the context of the images, the goggles seem to create related resonance. They give the men an extra-terrestrial sense, taking them out of their immediate context. But they also seem to be expressive of a certain Stoic condition in the humanity encountered, as the art of survival is slowly acquired. Thus a large bearded man wearing goggles holds a lizard up to the camera and describes in detail those natural resources that have facilitated the reptiles' adaptation to the harsh environment. The theme is further reinforced by the mysterious image of another goggled man with his head thrown back balancing a little ball on a thin cushion if air blown from his mouth; Herzog pans away from him to more carcasses. One may care to remember here that the central image of a film (*The Leopard Man*) by Jacques Tourneur, that classical advocate of a cautionary morality, was a little ball balanced on the fountain in the village square, the point of equilibrium in an environment rampant with terror and superstition in the face of the unknown; often during *Fata Morgana*, one senses that Herzog is the spiritual heir of those directors (Lang, Tourneur) whose films postulate a fundamental disparity between man and his environment — this, too, goes back to Marker and his idea of the documentary-synthesis, his search for "un art qui est le garant d'un accord entre l'homme et le monde". Yet, to gauge the mood of "Paradise", one must also take into account a sudden shot, seeming to rejoice in the spirit of Creation, in which Herzog pans down the vertical plane of a waterfall and up to the cliffs above, accompanied on the soundtrack by Blind Faith's "Sea of Joy". In ambiguous resolution, "Paradise" ends with the return of the strange mirage-like motion in the heat-haze.

The third section, the "Golden Age" extrapolates Herzog's concern with human factors that we have seen in "Paradise" to what might cursorily pass as the instigation of partnerships and communities in the process of Man's entrenchment. For the first time groups are shown; for example, a longshot of a congregation descending from a bus to go to church, as well as a strange shot during which men, women and children wallow in huge holes, laughing and gibbering. There seems to be an oblique comparison in Herzog's mind at this point between the native population, personified by their goggles in ambivalent stoicism, and the tourists, presented in rather more openly satirical vein. In one shot three tourists of varying sizes perch on rocks, one holding a flowerpot, another a twin-lens reflex camera, and the third, who laughs fatuously, a ukelele; behind them waits an Arab boy holding a camel. In another, explicitly evocative of the man with the lizard, a ridiculous frogman follows around a giant turtle in a pond in the hope that he will learn some of its natural secrets. But the most forceful sequences of the 'Golden Age" are those devoted to the man-and-wife musical night-club act from Teneriffe, Herzog's harsh view of the couple; while the woman plays expressionless accompaniment on the piano, the man, in goggles, performs an elementary percussion and imitates the sound of a trumpet with his voice. This shrill grating music punctuates the "Golden Age"; it is both hymn and dirge, as the couple endlessly repeat it, "death in their eyes, a smile in their faces, a finger in the pie". With its accompaniment, Herzog tilts up from stray bleached bones and pieces of card to the implacable horizon, as if to indicate the constant ambiguity of the environment. The film ends with the final repetition of the movement in the heat-haze, held slightly longer than previously, which retains in its necessary equivocation the spiritual essence of Herzog's documentary-farce. If in *Fata Morgana*, Herzog seems initially to follow Marker's interrogation of the subjective-objective distinction implicit in the consideration of the documentary form, his ascetism sets him apart. If Marker's starting point is the subjectivity of the dream ("...on entrevoit plus qu'on ne voit"), Herzog's is that of the nightmare, whose context is an implacable landscape and whose iconography is debris. Yet what he does share with the radical documentary is a belief in the goal of subjective perception — the belief that in the surface and objects and rituals of contemporary life there is continuity, even though stoically sought for, continuity with the past and the future. Herzog teaches us that the art of the documentary is not the recording of an existing world, but the revelation, within that existing framework, of other worlds.

Peter Lloyd

Bergman: the politics of melodrama

How bourgeois is bourgeois cinema?

Composition by sunlight. Clarity as "ideology" in Straub's Anna Magdalena Bach.

The history of conventional 'bourgeois' cinema over the last two or three years increasingly poses the question, in what sense are the 'marxist' claims of certain film-makers within the conventional system to be met? Clearly there is a case for attacking outright the complacency (of the media, of the press, of educated opinion) which puts that adjectival 'marxist' into operation as an element of *fashion*: (nothing the film public likes more than to be entertained by the ambiguous class modulations of the 'latest' film from Bunuel or Losey). The fact however that the political seriousness of either of these artists is unimpugned by the silliness of automatic labelling — that they are, after all that, in some sense *still* 'marxist' artists — suggests something of the nature of the difficulty. 'Marxist' evidently can't be equated with a necessarily overt polemical stance: for one thing, the films we are thinking of (*The Assassination of Trotsky, The Go-Between, The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* to take two or three at random) have on the surface only the most tenuous connection with modern industrial society. Nothing is clearer from thinking about these films than that their 'marxism' accommodates a sometimes intransigent *obliqueness*. Between the film-makers themselves, intelligent discrimination is more necessary than ever.

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Straub remarks somewhere that his film *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* is marxist "in so far as I have respected the mentality of my characters, the mentality of the period in which they lived." The implication here is that the film will be political not in the propagandist sense of "taking a line" — polemical or otherwise — but rather by constructing with precision and delicacy the feeling of a period so that, as it were, one arrives at it for the first time. The *historical* nature of the project will ratify its political relevance and enable us to see by contrast our own situation in a clearer light. Evidntly there is a certain difficulty in equating the 'marxist' element of Straub's project with an historical investigation, since 'historical' cinema (classically in Hollywood) provides precisely the most conventional opportunities for the distortion of 'history': to suggest that Straub's purpose is that of rectifying these distortions is to introduce notions of *accuracy* that are not really central (though they exist) to Straub's purpose. There is however a very simple sense (the only one I want to insist on immediately) in which an historical perspective means a grasp of the unfolding of successive revolutions, a comprehension of the birth and development of modern Europe and America in class terms.

A secondary, stronger, meaning, unstated explicitly by Straub in this particular interview, but there in his whole work, is the suggestion that the 'marxism' of a contemporary artist is guaranteed by a *theoretical* rigour, by a consistent interrogation of the signifying conventions of cinema in the interests of ideological precision. Straub employed in the construction of *Anna Magdalena Bach* a deliberate distantiation which comes out as is well known in a studied avoidance of the expressive: the characters speak in a neutral monotone, the narrative is fragmentary, whole sections of the film are given over to concentrating entirely on the music; the contents of the chronicle are conventionally banal (daily affairs, household accounts, financial worries) — there is everywhere a coolness and a distance which finds its visual metaphor in Straub's stone flagged interiors and the reticence of his plain German churches.

Now the strange thing is that these efforts towards distanciation served only to heighten the emotional resonance of the finished movie. A clue to this can be found in the same interview: here he quoted Griffith when he said "what the modern movie lacks is beauty, the beauty of the wind among the trees". The reference is to the "domestic" Griffith of *Broken Blossoms* and *True Heart Susie* and Straub duly punctuated *Anna Magdalena Bach* with marvellous shots of trees and sky. In the finished film the "poetry" of these scenes overflows their local context and permeates the whole social fabric as Straub portrays it, so that the "documentary" shots of actors engaged in the most mundane tasks, of writing, sewing, playing music or eating becomes filled with a poetic grace and acquires a kind of privileged intensity. Not only is the music exalting (it could scarcely fail to be) but every moment is directed towards this vision of chaste elegance, this ideal of the spacious and the commodious which lies at the heart of the film, suffusing it with light (which pours in through the tall astragalled windows and both literally and metaphorically illuminates the grave bare objects which furnish Straub's interiors). In a word, if anything is strange it is that this 'marxist' film should turn out to be a hymn of praise to a certain way of living which at its inception was classically *bourgeois*. In refinding an original and ideologically untainted cinema, one that recaptured the pristineness of the great silent masterpieces, Straub had chosen as subject matter the bourgeois class as it existed historically, at a certain early date when, as Lukacs would have it, it was still possible to see it as the repository of "enlightened" values.

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It might be profitable to consider the films of as seemingly private and obsessed an individual nature as Ingmar Bergman in this wider context. But before, and by way of a link, we might glance at another strange film which seems to be committed to an ideal vision of bourgeois society: Truffaut's *L'Enfant Sauvage*. What is most striking about this film is Truffaut's refusal to be ironical about the society which the boy Victor proved so resistant to. As in Straub, the black and white photography and the lowkeyed coolness of the leading parts — notably Truffaut himself as the boy's guardian Dr Itard — serves only to emphasise a sense of harmony and grace in the social rapports, characterised for instance in the austere decorum between the doctor and his servant Madame Guerin. And once more this harmony is established by a visual elegance and plainless observable in the tall panelled rooms with their large windows letting in an abundance of sunlight, or in the fittingness of the domestic trappings: carved wooden cupboards, sturdy domestic utensils and so on. The "education" of the boy which the film unfolds becomes a paradigm for the proprieties of social existence ,so that the scenes in which the boy is taught to eat a plate of soup or put on a pair of shoes acquires an intensity similar to Straub's: it is as if we were shown these elements of domestic life for the very first time in all their freshness and integrity. The possibilities of bourgeois life become the possibilities of a miraculous poetry.

By the end of the film, of course, the boy can only pronounce the word "lait" and even then in such a way as to make clear he has no conception of language. But there is, to repeat, no irony intended in this ,no polemic against the society which produced so signal a failure. It is no accident that Truffaut's portrayal of Itard emphasises his friendship with the enlightened professional classes who welcomed the French Revolution. In the dawn of this revolution in which the film is set there is a vital expectancy in the air. Reason — hence the emphasis on education — will triumph in the ordering of society. All the poignancy of these naive hopes was held in the scene in which Itard and his doctor colleague (whom he addresses as comrade) stand at the window of the Dead and Dumb Institute looking down through the rain at the huddled figure of the boy in the courtyard. Itard says he will take the boy into his own home and educate him himself; his friend, the director of the institute, is sceptical about his chances of success. The wistfulness of the scene resides in its being shot from the outside through the rain-splashed windows whose panes of glass act as a desolate and impassable barrier, an implicit comment on the doctor's hope and the utopian hopes of the whole revolutionary movement of 1789. *L'Enfant Sauvage* in short was a film whose "marxist" perspectives didn't prevent a certain ambiguous and unpolemical stance on the bourgeoisie, that class, in other words, which 1789 precisely threw into prominence.

It's perhaps worth adding at this point that part of the film's obliqueness lay in its modulation between distance (theoretical rigour, coolness) and its opposite: involvement (the film's evident warmth and emotional resonance), which may in turn have something to do with the biographical facts of Truffaut's own life. Here perhaps we can suggest that the ambiguity of Truffaut's portrayal of institutes and institutions is generated by a *personal* history or obsession. At any rate whatever the reason, the point established is that a "theoretical", distanced mise-en-scene does not preclude a strong emotional commitment to the audience on another level. Indeed ,such is the nature of the psychology and aesthetics of the viewing situation in any film, that it may even be argued that no film is theoretical which *doesn't* generate such an emotional bond between audience and screen.

A final word on Truffaut: I have argued elsewhere, that *Anne and Muriel* presented a section of the same bourgeoisie class a hundred years later, by which time it had become hopelessly reified in a world of false forms: Claude and Muriel live out their lives as a form of the *romanesque* (i.e. as the hero and heroines of their favourite novels) totally bewildered by the diversity of the roles that are offered them. It is as if the grand opportunities for socialization offered the boy in *L'Enfant Sauvage* (offered with all the optimism of an expanding bourgeois world) have exploded into a plethora of roles, each (because of the "unreality" of the basis of bourgeois life by this time) more 'inauthentic' than the last; as if, finally, economic independence as a groundwork for individual aspiration is now seen as anachronistic, delibitating (the parallel with Chechov is very clear). Once more this failure to find authentic 'being' was presented by Truffaut as having its own poignancy — his fascination for the forms in which this alienation works itself out remaining as strong as ever. The point to make clear however is that the film for all its 'remoteness', for all its apparent complicity in *chic* period nostalgia presented those with eyes to see with a message in the last resort *political and social:* this would be precisely my opening contention about Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* and the following notes will take up this perspective and suggest some qualifications.

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Cries and Whispers, a portrait of an enclosed bourgeois household, is set in a remote Swedish mansion at some unspecified time in the nineteenth century. As in *Anne and Muriel* and *Anna Magdalena Bach* (or in Losey's *The Go-Between* to take an English example) the remoteness of the period provides on one level an important critical distanciation: the reticence about dates, times and places is matched by another kind of precision in the forms of address, the clothes and the decor (presented with a scrupulous naturalism instantly recognizable for reasons we'll come to shortly) which enables us to grasp the context of the film, so to speak, *metaphorically*: it stands in its abstractness as a paradigm of *all* enclosed bourgeois environments. Besides this, the conventions and decorum of such a household in the nineteenth century — the relationship, for instance, between mistress and servants — establishes at once a more clear-cut and polarised class structure than would be possible with a contemporary subject matter. In fact, however, this polarity in *Cries and Whispers* allows room for considerable ambiguity/complexity focussed in the presentation of the servant woman Anna (Kari Sylwan) who looks after the household at the disposal of three sisters: Agnes (Harriet Andersson) Anna's mistress, dying of an unspecified disease, Karin (Ingrid Thulin) frigid and austere, and finally Maria (Liv Ullmann) presented as indolent, promiscuous and unable to cope with life. In spite of the evident demandingness of the sisters, there is a feeling which *Cries and Whispers* shares with *Anna Magdalena Bach* and *L'Enfant Sauvage* that the formal politeness and decorum engaged in in class relationships — one which obtains not only between mistress and servant, but also in one's professional relationship with doctors, pastors, mourning women etc. — not only doesn't prevent but positively encourages a certain moral probity and integrity. Like Straub again, Bergman conveys this by a visual pristineness; there is a scene early on in the movie in which we see Anna alone in her small room; the sun pours through the window on the narrow bare bed with its immaculate sheets and blankets. In front of her chest of drawers she repeats a short prayer for her dead child before biting into a large crisp apple. Like the portrait of the servant Madame Guerin in *L'Enfant Sauvage*, what we are presented with is a certain stoicism which is the outcome of the necessity of preserving an intuitive integrity in the face of being hourly at someone else's disposal. This comes out as an austere vision of duty as self respect: of "keeping things going", polishing silver, starching aprons, cooking fine dishes which may nevertheless get sent back after first mouthful, in short, of keeping the house in order. (There is an unfashionable exigence in Bergman's insistence on the validity of all this which I'll come back to: a left-wing feminist critique for instance might be troubled by Anna's "docility".) Furthermore, the "distance" set up by the clear demarcation of roles, mistress and servant, is undercut by a much more complex relationship which exists unarticulated between the four women; Agnes and Maria for instance find/demand in Anna not only the help which her duties as servant dictate but an emotional sustenance which goes far beyond them. As in Straub and Truffaut there are moments in the film when the relationship between the women, despite these outward constraints, seems to offer the possibility of an astonishing harmony: there is, for example, that important flashback from Agnes' diary of the three sisters dressed in white taking a walk in the park: Anna 'attends' them from a respectable distance and when they come to an old swing it is Anna who arranges the platform and pushes the swing backword and forward. What comes out in this scene in terms of a Straubian aesthetic is a "radiance", a sense of a self-sustaining and privileged

moment of being which all four of them share, while Agnes records in a voice over that this is her happiest memory.

Significantly enough this moment, in terms of the film's chronology, is from a previous autumn. The present tense of the film in contrast to Straub admits no such harmony; Agnes lies in bed wracked with pain and dies halfway through the film. The obsequies done, Karin and Maria split up the estate with the ghost of Agnes haunting them. Anna is dismissed from service with a trivial present and an uneasy smile: there is no ambiguity in Bergman's treatment of Karin's diplomat husband who pays Anna off, dry, arrogant, thoughtless, nor in the characterization of Maria at this point, weakly aware that this is not as things should be. One can speak here of a certain kind of class selfishness which on this level is rendered with a perfect psychological justness.

But I think we can go further: Straub's and Truffaut's films (or Godard's for that matter) are not 'marxist' by virtue of either just psychological representation or historical accuracy on the level of plot (although, as I have indicated, neither are as irrelevant as is sometimes argued). It's also a question — to get back to Straub's necessary obliqueness — of their formal preoccupations, the legitimate aesthetic concern about how the construction of the film mediates 'reality'. In Bergman's case the clue lies precisely in that scene on the swing already mentioned: it is the only outdoor scene in the entire film. Elsewhere we are struck by the predominance of an enclosed, hermetic and claustrophobic atmosphere: in place of Straub's windows covered with their clean carved shutters Bergman introduces heavy curtains and a stifling decor of red which seems to cover the entire wall and floor surface of the mansion in a decadent plush. Where have we seen all this before? Where have we suffered this theatrical oppressiveness? Precisely in those nineteenth century melodramas of Ibsen, Chekhov, Strindberg in which the alienation engendered by bourgeois society — the lies, the sexual hypocrisy, the corruscating snobbery — were first and classically articulated. Bergman's film seems to use this convention in a quite deliberate way: the opening shots in measured medium distance establish the country house as private, distanced, hermetic, separated from the outside world by its spacious park — as, precisely, a *dolls house* in whose 'artificial' atmosphere the ensuing drama will work itself out. From this point on the action of the film all takes place as it were *on stage*, and Bergman is rigorous in not taking advantage, except for that one occasion, of the opportunities the cinema classically provides for realism in location: (contrast here Losey's cinematic use of the Norfolk mansion in *The Go-Between*). This "use", if one can call it that, of the Chekhovian convention, provides ideally a further historical perspective, a reflection — ultimately a distancing device which ensures a theoretical dimension precisely because in imitating that stage convention so carefully, Bergman simultaneously challenges the ideology of realism the nineteenth century theatre was at such pains to uphold. (The prismatic 'irony' which results from juxtaposing one medium on another can also be seen — in a more schematic, "distanced" way — in the inter-war melodrama *Krankheit der Jugend* which takes up the first half of Straub's *The Bridegroom, the Actress and the Pimp* or, more recently, the performance of Corneille's *Othon* in Straub's film of that name).

Searching out the truth ... the relentless closeups of Cries and Whispers.

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The bourgeois melodrama as exemplified by Ibsen or Chechov has the advantage of providing Bergman with an immediate aesthetic vocabulary: the single set of the three act play gives him an enclosed and enclosing locus which can be used to emphasise that psychological clastrophobia which emerges in *Cries and Whispers* as a sense of *paranoia*: Karin is persecuted by precisely the objects which traditionally cluttered up the nineteenth century stage as a guarantee of the play's "realism" — furniture, pictures, cupboards and the like — and we see her sense of oppression culminate in her stabbing herself vaginally with a *wine glass* broken accidentally at the dinner table. The way in which props are used by Bergman to indicate a psychopathology of bourgeois existence is everywhere powerful and subtle. It emerges most obviously as a nausea of *abundance*: Karin, Maria and their husbands are sated by th objects which guaranee their social existence: the lavish dinner courses on silver dishes wheeled out as part of social form, find Karin unable to eat a mouthful. The abundance and waste extends to her clothes: Karin's act of mutilation is preceded by a scene in which, helped by Anna, she divests herself of her evening dress followed by numerous petticoats, slips and underclothes which she leaves in disarray for Anna to pick up, Karin has been literally enbalmed in convention. Again, the enclosed "theatrical" mise-en-scene Bergman uses is a pretext for the searching close-ups which are the film's stylistic hallmark and which define the sense of strain and boredom of bourgeois living in a way that surpasses the technical resources of the stage. The camera pans ceaselessly in close-up past chiming clock which reinforce the psychological agony of waiting: waiting for Agnes's death, waiting for someone or something to bring meaning to the survivor's neurotic, empty lives.

There is yet another way in which Bergman "uses" the conventions of nineteenth century melodrama. From *Hedda Gabler* to *The Three Sisters* to *Saint Joan* the nineteenth century stage offers the great roles to *women:* the violence of these melodramas is articulated through the great set speeches in which actresses were allowed to 'let go' in passion and hyperbole. In *Cries and Whispers* the scenes of most passionate violence — Agnes's death bed, Maria's attempt to 'court' Karin and Karin's response, Anna's reaction to Agnes's ghost — escape the charge of "theatricality" by that theatrically being so precisely assimilated into the mise-en-scene by its being taken account of at source, so to speak, so that it emerges not as directly *expressive* (though it is of course that) but as part of a complex aesthetic code, as a *style* of acting. This sense of a sophisticated understanding of cinematic and theatrical conventions is what makes *Cries and Whispers* superior to Bergman's previous film *The Touch*. It is not a question of one film's being more "intense" or "powerful" than the other: it is a conviction that in *The Touch* Bergman hadn't sufficiently mastered the ideological snares of filming a present day subject. Outside a reconisable genre or convention, the film came across as too blandly realistic: the domestic scenes in Bibi Andersson's house, for instance, scenes in which she hoovered the floor or worked in the kitchen had an unfortunate 'colour supplement' or television commercial flavour, while Eliott Gould as her American archeologist lover couldn't avoid a similarly unfortunate air of having walked in from a soap opera.

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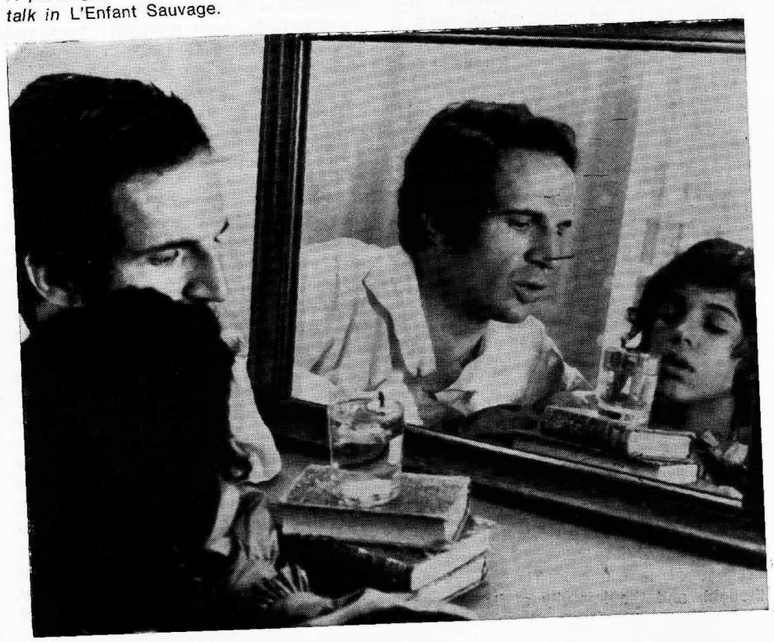
It would be wrong however to see Bergman's formal preoccupation as primarily involved in distantiation or irony: on the contrary, it is part of Bergman's exigence — we can take it or leave it, and it's certainly an unfashionable aesthetic — that we *feel* the violence of his film (a similar ambiguity — very crudely, a debate over the relative 'coolness' and detachment involved in a theoretical perspective — has already been remarked on in Truffaut. Traditional American narrative cinema would also provide a close aesthetic parallel.) Almost by definition, Bergman cannot maintain a formal "distance" when dealing with something as claustrophobic as domestic melodrama. Nor does he choose in the last resort: there is an old-fashioned insistence in Bergman, fundamentally resistant to marxist thinking, that his films embody truths not only about bourgeois society but also about the 'human condition'. The invariable close-ups pointing their relentless gaze on human features, on Liv Ullmann's beauty, Harriet Andersson's worn features, Ingrid Thulin's mask, are not only the stylistic correlative of filming a stage melodrama, but point to more traditional preoccupations — they literally search out *the truth*. Bergman's focus is on fundamental modes of experience which go beyond ideological divisions: in an early scene in *Cries and Whispers* the doctor who visits Agnes presss her abdomen and breast to discover the progress of her illness: it is a gesture that becomes a caress moments later when he fondles his former mistress Maria. Bergman's message at this point is that sex and pain are inseparable *as a fact of human existence*. Hence, the "cries and whispers" of the title, 'offstage" sound effects which punctuate the film while one or other of the women's faces is seen in close up; the sounds consist of an ambiguous sexual whimpering half way between pain and ecstasy, while the faces stare impassively before dissolving with fade out into a red background (instead of the customary black). The red as a matter of fact is rather important: far more even than in *Anne and Muriel* it functions in the mise-en-scene as a field of force aiming to grasp the audience in an unambigious emotional complicity. The scene in Truffaut's film where the screen is filled with the scarlet of Muriel's blood-stained sheet is more than matched by the violence of Karin's smearing her face with the blood of her vaginal wound. Similarly, the contrast between the "literary" death from consumption of Anne in *Anne and Muriel* and the wracked pain of Agnes in *Cries and Whispers,* speaks for itself: the death screams of the latter are offered as so many blows to the complacency of the audience.

To repeat, such an uncompromising aesthetic position is unfashionable, "unmodern". There is an audaciousness here we should attempt to define. Bergman's tendency in *Cries and Whispers* is to modulate the "marxist" (i.e. historical and materialist) implications of using the genre of melodrama towards playing with the transcendental notions of tragedy. This is clearly present in *Persona,* where Liv Ullmann plays an actress whose mental breakdown occurs during a performance of Euripides' *Elektra:* the bare white walls of the psychiatric clinic round which Ullmann paces in a flowing white nightdress should be seen, in contrast to the nineteenth century "clutter" of *Cries and Whispers,* as an attempt to suggest a mise-en-scene suitable for the acting out of a Grecian "tragedy". There is an insistence on tragedy's "universal" relevance which a modern audience may well find unacceptable. There are a few artists who continue to use symbolism — with its implications of a shared, deep-seated cultural heritage — as unambiguously, one is tempted to say as daringly, as Bergman. When ,in the image that the distributors of *Cries and Whispers* use for their publicity, Kari Sylwan strips naked before climbing into Harriet Andersson's bed to caress and comfort her, half the audience will respond as Bergman wishes to the power of this archetypal image of the *pieta*. Such is the cultural fragmentation of modern times, however, that the other half of the audience may find it merely risible. Thus for the time being Bergman offers few concessions to a materialist cinema.

Mark LeFanu

A paradigm of social existence ... Itard (Francois Truffaut) teaching the boy to talk in L'Enfant Sauvage.



Cries and Whispers Sweden 1972 *Dir written and prod* Ingmar Bergman *Phot* Sven Nykvist *Ed* Siv Lundgren *Mus* Bach, Chopin *Cast* Harriet Andersson (Agnes) Ingrid Thulin (Karin) Liv Ullmann (Maria) Kari Sylvan (Anna) Erland Josephson (Doctor) Georg Arlin, Henning Moritzen Anders Ek. *Prod* Cinematograph AB-SFI

WR: Mysteries of the Organism

Yugoslavia/W. Ger. 1971 **Dir** Dusan Makavejev **Ed** Ivan Vulcasović **Phot** Pega Popovic (Yugo) Aleksander Petkovic (USA) **Art Dir** Dragoljub Ivkov **Cast** Milena Dravic (Milena) Jagoda Kaloper (Jagoda) Ivica Vidovic (Vladimir Ilyich) Zoran Radmilovic (Radmilovic) Miodrag Andric (soldier) Tuli Kupferberg (US soldier) Jackie Curtis. **Prod** Neoplanta/Telepol (Novi Sad–Munich) 86 mins.

In Makavejev's second feature, *The Switchboard Operator* (1967), there is a scene where Isabella and Ahmed sit watching television. They are alone, silent in a small room, isolated from the events they observe on the television screen — Russian revolutionaries razing the idols of the Orthodox Church. The relationship between these two realities is complex. On the one hand they are totally separate: a historical manifestation of anti-religious turmoil (as presented in Vertov's *Symphony of the Donbas*), and a (relatively) present-tense private experience. On the other, they comment on each other, and even parallel each other, the tearing down of the spires serving as a hyperbolic analogy for Isabella's seduction of Ahmed; or, (in the retrospective light of *W.R.*), we might say that Isabella's destruction of Ahmed's repressive sexual attitudes is potentially constructive in the way that the razing of archaic religious institutions was an integral part of the Marxist revoluton. The third factor to be noted is the fact that Makavejev uses footage from a Vertov film (the falling spires also recalls scenes in Eisenstein's *October*), thus underlining not merely his ideological roots, but his aesthetic affiliations. This multiplicity of implicaton is characteristic of Makavejev's films, and marks the cast of his intellect as unique, in that it seeks to expand awareness rather than delimit, define, dogmatise. His films create debate, rather than end it.

Makavejev's allegiance to Eisenstein is not marked in *The Switchboard Operator,* apart from oblique references like the one instanced above. More immediately apparent are his affinities with Godard: their common exploration of the minimal experiences of life, their rejection of climaxes that are the clichés of melodrama. Thus in *Masculin-Feminin,* Godard explores (in '15 precise events', like Makavejev's distinctive episodic structure in *The Switchboard Operator*) the 'trivial' moments in the lives of Paul and Madeleine, just as Makavejev presents everyday ephemera, such as the close-up of the kettle boiling on an upturned iron, or the installation of the shower; the surrealist imagery of the motor-bike by the billiard-table and the buttocks/egg dissolve function in a similarly revelatory manner. But the intentions of the two directors are opposed: where Godard finds in the everyday, the trivial, the *lack* of real contact and communication that is reflected in the spatial vacuums and awkwardness of his visual compositions, Makavejev discovers a means of expressing the essence of the intimacy that develops between Isabella and Ahmed. Godard searches for a 'tendresse' that eludes him; it does not elude Makavejev, and one current of his films is concerned both with the expression of it (capturing is fleeing moments — the cat lying on Isabella's naked body), and the location of it in a specific context, a context that includes war and death. Even the fact of Isabella's death cannot diminish the value and beauty of their love. Under a common surface of style and structure, Godard and Makavejev manifest very different thematic preoccupations: 'Godard has placed himself at the service of the revolution. I don't want to serve,' Makavejev has said. This difference in political ardour is concomitant with their different view of the contemporary potentiality for happiness, as is emphasised by Makavejev's *W.R.*: his refusal to preach political dogma is as ineluctable as the final smiling faces of Milena and Reich, his two central protagonists.

Nevertheless, this refusal has led to severe critical attacks on *W.R.,* principally from that portion of the left that understands political seriousness (dogma) as the prerequisite (in a director from the Eastern Bloc) for admission to the Pantheon. And admittedly some of their comments carry authority, (although often at the risk of the naive critical error of attacking Makavejev's intentions 'per se'). Of these attacks, perhaps the most perceptive is Joan Mellen's in *Cinéaste;* interestingly, however, she carries most weight in her observations about Makavejevs handling of the figure of Reich, and the liberating power of sex, rather than in her political comments. These latter derive from a debatable criterion of 'commitment': 'Attempting to inspire a new liberated sensibility through this melange of images, *W.R.* is rendered incoherent because of the ambiguity of its point of view' Mellen equates ambiguity with confusion, but ambiguity is perhaps not the most apposite term. 'Ambivalence' serves better, I think, in relation to *W.R.*, with its more specific connotations: the coexistence of apparently contradictory aspects. In a manner that is almost Borgesian, Makavejev's *W.R.* concerns itself with the discrepancies between the force of a specific moral concept in its pure form *and* its historical degeneration; between the individual and social realms of existence. The purity of thought, and the impurity of its enforcement (enforcement being a crucial term) are perhaps the polarities around which Makavejev explores his specific themes. This was clear even in *The Switchboard Operator,* in the discrepancy between the praiseworthy openness of the ideas expounded by the sexologist, and the sterile, academic manner of their communication. This ambivalence is not the mark of confusion, but of the maturity of a mind that refutes the assertive authority of the 'either . . . or . . .' proposition that remains at the base of Western, and particularly radical, thought. Mellen's tendency obfuscates her perceptions — for instance she writes that 'It is unclear whether Chou, Lin and Mao are to be seen as the liberators or repressers of sensuality. The huge crowd scene suggests conformity, a programmed mass clutching the pre-digested thoughts of their 'chairman', in direct opposition to liberated individuality. But the smiles of the leaders seem benevolent, an expression of positive achievement . . .' The parallel, she goes on to suggest between the Maoist and Stalinist footage is no more than superficial: in clarifying the positive tone of the Maoist scene we have only to note its colour, the strong movement of the crowd (flux, flexibility), against the black-and-white, regimented formalism of the Stalinist episodes. The parallels of paternalistic leaders and programmatic ideology are significant only at a surface level that is insensitive to both emotional tone and structural placing.

Joan Mellen's perceptions are more acute in other areas, however: 'Makavejev ignores the psychiatric view at the heart of Reich (and Freud) that bodily tensions freed in orgiastic release do not yield a permanent liberation unless the original trauma is made conscious and re-experienced.' And she cites the words of Reichian therapist Dr John Pierrakos: 'Reich believed that sexuality should be based on feelings of love, but Makavejev makes no distinction between healthy sexuality and libertinism. He dissociates sex from love.' The result is the simplistic idea 'that free love is a sufficient answer to alienation, that when the revolution abandoned free love, it was lost.'

Uncharacteristically, Makavejev seems indeed to have resorted to simplification in the attempt to crystallise the link between the individual and social realities: maybe it was a risk endemic to the ambitiousness of his project — though it must be admitted that the necessity of love is central in *The Switchboard Operator* and is evidenced in *W.R.* in the death of Milena.

Mellen's other main objection to the film is of more partial relevance, dealing with 'the inauthenticity of lies of ommission': 'We are given a Reich stripped of his early Marxism, of his concern with mass psychology, and his theory of work democracy (workers' control).' While the accuracy of her comment is unquestionable, its validity is mitigated by two factors: firstly, despite its title, the film is not merely a documentary about Reich; and secondly, the material we are given on Reich is subordinated to a larger structural co-ordinate, the dialecic between concept and manifestation. The degeneracy in time of initially 'pure' ideas is central to the film, and is reiterated in Makavejev's presentation of Reich, which contrasts the integrity of his ideas about orgasm with the image of a beleaguered eccentric who pleads that he voted for Eisenhower.

Finally it is Makavejev's method that is the most fascinating aspect of *W.R.* (as it had been in his earlier films), rather than our disagreement or agreement with his ideas. An analysis of Makavejev's method is crucial both for a comprehension of what Makavejev is doing, and what is happening to cinema in a broader sense: the microcosm illuminates the macrocosm. Although (as Robin Wood has pointed out) the structure of *The Switchboard Operator* is an innovation in its apparent schematisation and fragmentation of narrative sequentiality, it is his next film, *Innocence Unprotected* (1968), that is of crucial interest in illuminating the form of *W.R.* Taking as its starting point a creaky, whimsical film, part fiction and part autobiography of a circus strong-man (Aleksic), Makavejev used new, contemporary footage (the original was shot secretly during the war years) of interviews with the original participants; to this he added newsreel footage, and a hand-tinted print of the original. In an interview in *Cahiers du Cinéma,* Makavejev said of Aleksic's script: 'le scenario initial tenait sur un sac de papier, ou était écrit "Amour, compassion, pauvre orpheline, homme riche, bel acrobate, affreuse maratre, bagarre, police, justice, happy end".' To this formidable catalogue or the standard ingredients of kitsch melodrama, Makavejev contributes the authority of a benevolently critical paternalism, enlarging the areas of significance of the original film (which Makavejev retains almost in its entirety) by judicious cutting in extra material which through parallels or conflicts with other images, demands our emotional or intellectual engagement with Aleksic and his naive, simplistic story: his story becomes, in its new context, a metaphor for folk melodrama that, through its juxtaposition with newsreel material of the 'real world', and interviews with its heroes and heroines twenty years later, incarnates the very spirit of the Yugoslav people themselves. It generates an atmosphere of generosity and beneficient humanism, and elevates Aleksic to the status of a paradigmatic hero. At the same time the larger context is an inherently critical placing of the 'B' movie genre: for all its fantasising, and charm, it is the portrayal of an irreality that might not be healthy. The 'judgements' posited by the film are multifarious, often apparently incompatible: but, as I've already suggested, such multiplicity and apprehension of paradox is one of the defining characteristics of Makavejev's art; and it expression is facilitated by his grasp of Eisenstein's 'montage as collision . . . as conflict' principles. Some of the cutting creates an ambiguity that derives largely from the temporal confusion, as when we see Aleksic performing a stunt in 1940, then we see him attempting the same stunt (in colour) in 1968: do we admire his continuing strength, laugh at the ludicrousness of his stunt outside the specific context it was created for, or do we merely feel a sense of mortality, of impending age that will end these stunts? Through the simple temporal juxtapositions, and elision of fictional and documentary forms, Makavejev utilises the theoretical propositions first formulated by Eisenstein (to whom he has also acknowledged his delight in the surreal: 'Rappelez-vous cette séquence de *La Grève* où les policiers à cheval sont sur les balions. Les qualités surréalistes se trouvent dans la réalité.') And Makavejev's use of footage by Alexandrov (the circus cannon), commenting on the influence of the American cinema on the Russians, ('Circus était l'un de ces "musicals" réalistes-socialistes') both, like the use of Vertov in *The Switchboard Operator,* offers homage to the Russian masters, and, in the Alexandrov instance, casts a quizzical, cynical eye forward to the 'Socialist art in Czarist costume' critique of *W.R.*

In many respects *WR* is a summation of the concerns of *The Switchboard Operator* and *Innocence Unprotected* (I have not seen *Man is not a Bird* [1966]) but its structure is more complex, less easily classified. Fundamentally the film manipulates documentary and archive material surrounding the life and work of Wilhelm Reich in America and a fictional story set in Yugoslavia;* within this double-structure, and acting to break down barriers between them, are 'appearances' by a number of the New York 'avant-garde' (Tuli Kupferberg, Jackie Curtis etc), and some Russian archive footage, from Chiaurelli's *The Vow* (1971), in which Gelovani plays Stalin. Whereas the inter-relations of segments in *Innocence Unprotected* (however rich in implication) was simple, (old film/old film's actors in present/historical archive material/Makavejev's own interpretative hand-tinting), the inter-relationships of *WR* are challengingly complex. The material on Reich, for instance, involves contemporary interviews with his associates, and his second wife; it uses archive footage of Reich; it uses his recorded voice over contemporary visuals. The evasion of dogmatic assertion in this exploratory method is evidence of Makavejev's desire to ask questions, not present answers. But the problem is that, of course, Makavejev cannot avoid making statements, especially when he uses an abrasive montage as the root of his art; because collision implies a result, and if Makavejev has engineered the collision, we must presume he intended the result. One example: Eva Reich-Moise says 'The American Dream is dead', and Makavejev cuts in a Coca-Cola jingle, living evidence of the American Dream, 'Coke is the way it should be, the real thing, Coca-Cola, that's the way it is . . .' etc. Similarly Makavejev is critical of Reich himself: he is described as drawing a gun on people — pretty ironical for one whose researches and theories were preaching anti-repression! One can only assume his orgasms weren't as fine as those of his converts? And the intercutting of Orgone Therapy patients with Nazi 'euthanasia' victims is critical in visual terms (through parallel), though on 'intellectual' terms we may say that the similar outward physical manifestations hide very different interiors — spiritual/physical release on the one hand, spiritual/physical repression on the other. This sort of ambivalence is recurrent in the film, and results not from confusion, but from the recognition of an inherent paradox in the sort of demands made by the state, or social unit, and those made by the individual.

The philosophical tightrope that Makavejev treads is one which recognises the ultimate disparity between individual and state; it is this disparity that precludes the possibility of isolating a positive intellectual base, a concrete and a specific 'statement' of attitude or belief. And the disparity is presented it terms of sex/the individual and politics/the state; (even this equation is prone to caustic, ironic reversals). Makavejev's 'statement' is, finally, the sum of the film's contradictions and juxtapositions; and many of these may be unconscious juxtapositions, the result of the intuitive painterly attitudes that Makavejev works by when compounding his films, rather than conscious, rational, dialectical oppositions *WR* is as much the manifestation of the interior consciousness of Makavejev, as it is the exterior intellectualisations of Makavejev the film-maker. The only statement we may make, is that Makavejev's film concerns the rights of the individual above the demands of the state: 'Tout le monde participe au mouvement social, mais on n'est pas obligé d'être toujours en groupe. L'individualisme, c'est l'amour, c'est le droit à être fou, c'est le droit aux conflits personnels.'

However, my present concern is the structure of the film as an 'art-object', as a self-validating, cohesive experience; in particular the ways in which Makavejev has absorbed and expanded on the aesthetic contributions of Eisenstein and Godard. I have already commented on

* The best simple sequential account of the film is David Robinson's prosaically useful piece in Sight & Sound vol 40 no 4, Autumn 1971.

Makavejev's use of montage, but it is worth noting that Makavejev's montage is not one of static images (as *Strike* was, fundamentally), but a montage of mise-en-scène, a juxtaposition of moving images, of narrative invention and newsreel documentary that extends the essentially (frigid) propagandist purpose of Eisenstein to a witty humaneness of response that involves the co-existence of an existential pessimism (Godard) and a *potential optimism* (*Renoir*). For the 'heroine', Milena, is smiling, with Reich, at the end, yet her death is an inevitability, a result of an egocentric humanitarianism that is never a match for the fascistic 'mass-credo' epitomised in Vladimir Ilyich, the ice-skater. (Another example of Makavejev's irony is the fact that despite her avowed sexual freedom, Milena's attitude to Radmilovic — 'the worker' — is both patronising and near-repressive.) Her impending doom is unequivocally stated in the scene in which Milena shows Vladimir a photograph of Hitler surrounded by adoring women; they wheel balletically around the room, the photo clasped between them. Vladimir's dancing/skating has already been identified as 'decadent' (our first view of him is through the huge pink feather hats of his fellow skaters), as repressed sexuality, and Milena's adoring gaze upon Vladimir is a sombrely witty parallel to the expression upon the faces of Hitler's women. The parallel of Vladimir and Hitler is explicit, and Milena's impending death inescapable.

Makavejev's debt to Eisenstein is to the early theoretical writings that advanced the concept of montage as a dialectical principle, not a narrative procedure; montage as collision, not linkage; also Eisenstein's concern with non-diegetic material as a force for crystallising thematic motifs has been influential on the younger director, whose hard satiric edge and abrasive humour (born of juxtaposition) reflects the spirit of the young Eisenstein. They have a common concern with caricature, and the grotesque, but Makavejev's tend to be real (Jackie Curtis, Tuli Kupferberg) as much as fictional (Vladimir Ilyich). But the crucial distinction between Makavejev and Eisenstein (and this also defines Makavejev's *advance* on Eisenstein) comes in their central, self-confessed intentions, the purpose to which they put their technique: Eisenstein's work was increasingly orientated toward stylistic syncretism, the total fusion of the forces generated by sound and image, the synchronicity of colour, thought, music. In contradistinction, Makavejev's method is one of antinomic conflict, even occasionally in regard to the relationship between *sound and image*. Makavejev's use of sound owes much to Godard challenging the status of what we *see*, though it is usually more subdued than the querulous confrontations of Godard. For instance, the plaster-casting of *Screw* editor Tim Buckley's penis is distinguished not merely by the outrageously kitsch flowery sofa on which Buckley reclines, or the witty cutting in of the narcissistic Jackie Curtis crossing herself at a 'shrine': the musical accompaniment moves from the airy triviality of light classical to 'Kill for Peace', and then, as the plaster touches the penis, a Tchaikovsky-like portentousness sweeps in: its fraudulent weightiness exposes the melodramatic aspect of the plastercasting, while also being a simple pastiche on the way a skin-flick director might handle the sequence: the irony is two-way. Makavejev's economical debunking of 'the media' is here a nice by-product of the way in which he examines and questions *our* response to the event on the screen. Thus Makavejev's use of the soundtrack doesn't, as in Godard, directly deny the reality-status of the image, but tends rather to impose a critical activity, an abrasive wit that enlarges one's response rather than limiting it in a reductive manner.

Makavejev's artistic affiliations are more to the surrealists than to the social-realists. Unlike Eisenstein, whose montage technique was essentially limited to the conflict of ideas within successive images or shots (or at most the sequence), Makavejev's montage reverberates through the whole film, leaving an impression of collage, rather than sequential montage. The connection between disparate images is often independent of the diegetic evolution. Thus we note a parallel between Radmilovic's spurting hose, and the magisterial fountain behind Tuli Kupferberg at one point as he prowls Manhattan; there is a cryptic similarity between the orgone therapy patient who clutches idolatrously at Dr Lowe's hand held tantalisingly above her, and the women looking lovingly at Hitler. Indeed Makavejev's structural method falls into two broad categories: syntagmatically (sequentially) it is based on conceptual parallels rather than contradictions; paradigmatically it is based on conceptional parallels rather than contradictions.

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On his appearance in the film, Radmilovic comments of the red bourgeoisie, 'All they care about is food, fashion and Max Factor', recalling the words that appear near the end of *Masculin-Feminin*. "This film could be called the children of Marx and Coca-Cola. Understand who will" Makavejev understands, and *WR* brilliantly exploits the disintegrating distinction between fact and fiction to create a fusion between the initially separate worlds of America and Eastern Europe. Godard has consistently found new ways of expressing his awareness of film as a non-reality (both as hardware, and as a medium of illusion utilising actors). One instance is the opening of *Deux ou Trois Choses . . .*, in which the 'heroine' is twice introduced to us by the narrator, making us aware of the coexistent oneness and separateness of Marina Vlady (address) and Juliette Janson (fictional character). Similarly the credit sequence of *WR* involves three of its fictional characters (although they are called by their real names — Milena, Radmilovic, Jagoda) sliding the yoke of an egg from hand to hand until, covered in yolk, they stare (knowingly, insolently, happily) into the camera with an 'know you're watching me' look on their faces, that almost challenges our voyeurism. Still, that is no *advance* on Godard. What is an advance, though, is the complex interweaving or fictional and documentary material (and the interweaving of past and present) that finally blurs our awareness of any distinction between the two. There is newsreel footage; there are contemporary interviews; there are theatrical grotesques (Jackie Curtis, symbolising for Makavejev the 'loss of identity' of contemporary America — or of Russia) and the 'happening' of Tuli Kupferberg, whose antics pre-exist in an art-object (the aesthetics of the street happening are committed to the destruction of distinctions between art and life), and yet are as *real* as Jackie Curtis sucking an ice-cream in the street. The boundaries dissolve in mid-Atlantic, until we reach the apparently clear-cut fictional figures in the Yugoslavian narrative. But again the issue is complicated by the incorporation of archive material, and Vladimir Ilyich's real-life ice-ballet company; the distinctions blur again when we realise that the archive footage of Stalin is not Stalin, but an actor playing Stalin, whose fictive existence is external to the fictive substance of *WR* itself, thus creating a gentle ironic commentary on this fusion of forms.

At another point in the film, Makavejev cuts to a static aerial view of New York — then tracks out to reveal it is only a poster, (another illusion of reality), and that in fact we are in Yugoslavia, while Vladimir pontificates about 'the overrated West'. Just as fact and fiction fuse, so do the differences between East and West, and Makavejev transcends the ephemera of ideological squabbling through the brilliantly inventive flexibility of his visual imagination, and forces us to consider art as a meaningful and integral part of our daily existence.

Godard's apprehension of the rift between art and life led him to formulate his theories of why and how traditional cinematic forms can only reinforce the bourgeois ideological and economic foundations of our society. Hence his more recent work has consistently denied the audience its expectations of 'entertainment' and has confronted us with the incompatability of bourgeois structures and revolutionary morality. The rigorous intellectual (political) logic of his mind is very different from the equally challenging procedures of Makavejev. The destruction of the bourgeois cinematic structures is inherent in, contained within, the new 'interiorised' structuring of Makavejev's conglomerate materials. The simplicity of the old narrative forms is ruptured by the introduction of 'alien' cinematic elements, yet the whole remains 'entertainment' of the first order: most significantly it is entertainment that demands to be taken as inextricably intervowen with the very fabric of our lives, that it affect our relationships with the world, rather than anaesthetise them.

Martin Walsh

Frenzy

Great Britain 1972 **Dir** and **Pr** Alfred Hitchcock **Sc** Antony Schaffer **Phot** Gil Taylor **Ed** John Jympson **Art Dir** Robert Laing **Pr Des** Sydney Cain **Cast** John Finch (Richard Blaney) Barry Foster (Bob Rusk) Anna Massey (Babs Milligan) Barbara Leigh-Hunt (Brenda Blaney) Alec McCowen (Inspector Oxford) Vivien Merchant (Mrs Oxford) Bernard Cribbins (Forsythe) **Prod** Alfred Hitchcock for Universal 116 mins.

In the light of *Frenzy*'s apparent failure to win popular acclaim, there is a certain irony surrounding the grandiose rhetoric of its opening sequence — Hitchcock bearing down on the city of his beginnings, celebrating his own return with a triumphal march and a majestic procession down the Thames to Tower Bridge. It may be an appriopriately Hitchcockian irony that this grand homecoming should be followed by an uncomfortable silence, an ironic reversal of the expected such as he himself so often engineers, but it makes the point that *Frenzy* is an uncomfortable film and poses the critical question, why? The familiar features are, perhaps all too obviously, there — the counterpoint of macabre juxtapositions, the striking effects of emotional manipulation, the powerful pessimistic vision — but the overall pattern remains elusive. There is something factitious, even laboured about the composition of the individual parts. Struck by the literary echoes of the opening scene — London, the river, and a floating corpse — the hasty critic is tempted to repeat Henry James' verdict on another late work by master hand, *Our Mutual Friend:* "it is poor with the poverty not of momentary embarassment, but of permanent exhaustion. It is wanting in inspiration . . . it is dug out as with a spade and pickaxe." Yet James' criticism has not worn well, and Hitchcock has been prematurely written off too often to allow one to dismiss him simply by an unfavourable comparision with earlier work.

The thematic continuity *Frenzy* displays with earlier works is plain enough. Blaney and Rusk act out the drama of wronged innocence and exchanged guilt that is by now familiar (see *The Wrong Man, I Confess* etc.). Wrongful accusation and sentence arouse in Blaney a homicidal impulse of revenge which equates him morally with the killer and involves him in the latter's guilt. This involvement at the same time extends to the audience who become, so to speak, accomplices of the attempted crime by responding sympathetically to the powerful emotional justification of Blaney's desire for revenge. The theme thus both offers considerable scope for Hitchcock's characteristic deployment of cinematic art to control and manipulate his audience's emotions, and also serves to dramatize his vision of the fragility of civilized order, of the swift and arbitrary way in which order may be perverted into chaos, reason into unreason, ordinariness into evil. This sense of the lurking horror that stalks all life is at the heart of this film as it has been of so many others, and it is expressed in a range of different modes from the brutally dramatic (the strangling), through the macabre (the body in the potatoes), to the uncomfortably repulsive (the dishes served up by the inspector's wife).

The Necktie Murders . . . Barbara Leigh-Hunt as reluctant victim.

If this chilling insight is itself not new to Hitchcock, what sets *Frenzy* slightly apart from predecessors such as *The Birds* is the sickening insistence and the disturbing levity with which it is elaborated. His vision has darkened with age and in a particular way; the macabre has become physically nauseating and his response a mirthless laugh; Sartrean nausea is mixed with comedy as bleak as Beckett's. Thus a bowl of fish soup can project something like the naked obscenity of existence in the context of an absurdly comic and trivial domestic situation — a bored housewife's attempt to master a sophisticated cuisine. That this juxtaposition of the profoundly repulsive and the trivially comic has a disturbing effect is clear, but it seems to have no purpose beyond that effect. Instead of heightening or qualifying each other by their proximity, the two elements simply coexist in an uneasy tension, cohabiting as disturbingly as the barmaid's corpse and the potatoes.

There may, therefore, be a continuity and a sense of continuing development about Hitchcock's vision, but this alone cannot provide *Frenzy* with a coherent structure. *The Wrong Man* theme lies too obviously on the surface to give any coherence in depth to the film, while the relationship between Blaney and Rusk, although it suggests the possibility of psychological exploration, is too perfunctorily treated to have any significance as a study of a dual personality, of character and alter ego. Instead, then, of searching for a crucial pattern in terms of theme or character, it may be better to begin by examining certain of the striking formal features of *Frenzy* in order to make sense of the whole.

Probably the most arresting feature of all is the camera's slow, silent retreat down the empty staircase after following Rusk and his next victim, the barmaid, up to the door of his flat. The sequence becomes something like a paradigm of Hitchcock's art as the camera tracks back and back, and out into Covent Garden to show the market about its daily business, to show a world that can no longer be taken at its innocent face-value since we are now aware of the horror that lurks behind its bland exterior. But more importantly, the sequence is a vir-

Macabre realism . . . Rusk (Barry Foster) dealing with an intransigent corpse

tuoso feat of audience manipulation, a form of cinematic coitus interruptus; led on by recollection of an earlier sequence where Hitchcock had held us in suspense and then released us with a scream (the scream of discovery as the secretary finds the first body), we await a climax of horror, or at least the sounds of violence. But the climax never comes. The consummation of violence and the attendant release of psychic tension are witheld, with the result that that tension is correspondingly heightened and carried over into the subsequent course of the action. Once again the effect is disturbing, indeed frustrating, and Hitchcock adds to the frustration in later scenes: the outcome of Blaney's trial is, for instance, withheld from us by a soundproof glass-panelled door, behind which we can see the trial coming to an end but through which we cannot hear the verdict. By such sequences as these our psychic energy is, so to speak, dammed up behind a wall of frustration, forcing us to identify ever more closely with the frustrated Blaney — a victim of events just as we are victims of their mode of narration — until, when the violent release finally comes, the full force of our pent-up energy is behind the frenzied blows he smashes onto the figure in the bed. The consummation is finally achieved, all the more violent for its long delay and all the more terrible in its aftermath of cold realization.

This technique of frustration thus functions as a typically Hitchcockian means of involving, incriminating, us in the central drama of the film; of manipulating us into acknowledgement of our own potential violence, and of delivering us a sharp moral rebuke for expecting and wanting to witness another murder. What is more, it underlines the equation of violence with sexuality already present in the actions of the psychopathic Rusk, for whom sex takes the form of homicidal assault. Gratification comes through violence both for the murderer and for the audience, and in teasingly delaying the climax Hitchcock creates an intensity of desire in his audience which matches the vengeful frenzy of his frustrated heroes. The equation of sex and violence could thus be said to extend to Hitchcock's use of something like a sexual technique to perpetrate a form of violence on his audience. It has become a facet of style as well as a thematic concern.

Hitchcock's concern with the theme is, in fact, almost obsessive, to the extent that *Frenzy* could be described as the culminating expression of a puritan streak that runs through most of his work. He is, of course, no prude, but a distaste for, or suspicion of, sexuality can be clearly discerned in, for instance, the imaginative sympathy he has extended to a long line of frigid heroines. *Marnie* is a late and pertinent example, for it is precisely the fear of sex as murderous violence that is at the root of Marnie's neurotic personality. In her eyes sex and love are incompatible, eros necessarily excludes caritas, the red is opposed to the white; and the story of her cure is the process by which these false oppositions are overcome and the wholeness of her life restored. Thus *Frenzy* takes what in *Marnie* was a neurotic obsession, a personal aberration, and raises it to the level of an objective insight. Sexual desire **is**, directly or indirectly, violent and destructive: the sexually active male is a predatory beast and the female his helpless prey. London is littered with the victims of a ruthless appetite which, as the early sequence by the Thames suggests, pollutes civilization itself.

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To say this is to imply that the lines of moral judgement are clearly drawn, but one of the difficulties of *Frenzy* is, in fact, the ambiguity of Hitchcock's stance. Certainly, civilization is here the domain of the female; women have assumed the dominant social role. Blaney is taken out to dinner by his wife and provided with pocketmoney: a large, commanding woman and a small, meek man descend the stairs of the marriage-bureau, happy in their unequal union: when Blaney and the barmaid are accosted in the park by a former R.A.F. friend, the camera moves up and away to zoom in on the stern figure of the latter's wife, high up in a glass-fronted tower-block, gazing down from this fortress of modern civilization on the husband she dominates and Blaney whom she mistrusts, despises, and finally ejects. It is the women who represent civilized order (and this idea is parodied in the inspector's wife and her attempts at haute cuisine), while the energetic, impulsive male is a parasite and an outcast. Yet, of course, it is on the side of the outcast that the film sympathetically engages: the heavily emphasized violence of Blaney's character appears as a legitimate response to a frustrating predicament, whilst even Rusk invites a certain sympathy in his struggle with the corpse-woman perversely dominant even after death. And were the police inspector to strangle his wife, it would scarcely seem more than she deserves.

So where does Hitchcock take his stand? Is he inveighing against the destuctive violence of male sexuality, or is he rather rebelling against the "monstrous regiment of women" in an emasculated civilization? The ambiguity goes right through the film, culminating in the black comedy of the dénouement. The inspector watches Blaney vent his violence on the body in the bed, which turns out to be not Rusk but his latest female victim and then both watch while Rusk enters noisily with a large black trunk to dispose of the body. There is no violence between the men; no word of recrimination or accusation is passed, merely a facetious comment from the inspector about Rusk having forgotten his necktie. Grouped around the trunk, the three men stand like accomplices around a coffin, partners in guilt, forming a club-like masculine conspiracy against the feminine world — a world represented by the strangled corpse on the bed, a grotesque caricature of blond, bosomy femininity. The woman is physically repulsive, just as the men are morally repugnant, and if Hitchcock's attitude is ambiguous here, the ambiguity can be resolved by interpreting his condemnation as indiscriminate and universal. It is a disturbing ending to a disturbing film, and the explanation for this particular quality seems to lie finally in the nihilistic implications of Hitchcock's vision. It is not only civilized society but life itself that withers under his ruthless scrutiny, and the only mitigation he offers is a humourless laugh. The moralist has given way to the nihilist whose art consists in the violent manipulation of his audience and a composition of different shades of black.

John Rignall

Tristana

Italy/France/Spain 1970 **Dir** Luis Bunuel **Sc** Julio Alejandro from a novel by Benito Perez Galdos **Phot** José F Aguayo **Ed** Pedro del Rey **Art Dir** Enrique Alarcon **Cast** Catherine Deneuve (Tristana) Fernando Rey (Don Lope) Franco Nero (Horacio) Lola Gaos (Saturna) Jesus Fernandez (Saturno) Antonio Casas, Vincente Solar, Fernando Cabrian, Candido Losado **Prod** Corona (Paris)/Selenia Cine Prod D.S. (Rome)/Epoca Talia Film (Madrid) 105 mins.

Tristana is clear yet subtle, forceful but oblique, witty yet profound, compassion-oblique, witty yet profound, compassionate yet merciless, grave even in the midst of its humour, incomparable in the precise, even perfection of its mise en scene. *Tristana* is that rare thing: an absolutely flawless masterpiece, where every single detail bears the imprint of the director and where it is impossible to even begin to think in terms of a gap between intention and realisation, since it is in the very intricacy of the mise en scène that Bunuel's conception is deepened and fully actualised. In a context where critical standards remain highly unstable and where the deck of pantheon films is endlessly reshuffled and reconstituted it is all the more necessary to insist on the greatness of *Tristana*: both to isolate it as the key film of the contemporary era and as the work that has done most to advance the art of cinema, and to assert that in the whole history of the film medium perhaps only *Ivan the Terrible* and *La Règle du Jeu* are worthy of standing alongside it. On this it is necessary to be as merciless as Bunuel himself.

Is it accidental that, of the films I have named, both *Ivan* and *Tristana* were made under conditions of political censorship? Bunuel, of course, chose to work in such a context voluntarily and to turn the ostensible drawbacks to his advantage. On the evidence of these films, censorship can serve as a positive stimulus since it forces the artist to adopt more complex ways of encoding references into his work and to avoid obvious allegorical methods. When censorship is out in the open and operates with certain ground rules the writer or film maker at least knows where he stands and can procede accordingly; in the ostensibly freer context of Western bourgeois democracy censorship can often spread its net more widely, since it is worked by a diversity of agencies and masked by aesthetic and commercial criteria. The official objection to an English *Tristana*, could one exist, would be that it was a bad film and poor commercial proposition. This situation effectively paralyses art, for the artist does not know what is permitted because he does not know what is forbidden; he fritters away his energy in a vain effort to please and to satisfy nebulous and phantasmagorical requirements, whose decisive characteristic is that they can neither be satisfied nor defined. Art itself becomes the realm of the nebulous: confused, mystical and ultimately irrelevant, since it dare not have any specific referent.

Tristana does have a referent, which is Spain, Spanish history and, in particular, the period in the thirties leading up to the seizure of power by Franco and the Fascists, with the support of Germany and Italy. To interpret *Tristana* means, effectively, to make explicit all the encoded references to Spanish politics in the picture. However, within the context of contemporary criticism, the problem then arises as to what exactly is the status of these references? Are they a kind of bonus to Galdos' novel? Since the correspondance between the events in the film and Spanish history is not complete, in the sense of not being a straightforward allegory, are we to assume that *Tristana* falls short of being a completely political film, while at the same time cluttering up its treatment of social and psychological themes by forcing us to experience it against a background of confused and unarticulated political static and interference?

What I want to argue is that *Tristana* creates a problem because it clearly reveals the limitations of Western aesthetics. Western theories of art provide no adequate understanding of what art is or why it is meaningful. This is essentially because they are theories of correspondence or non-correspondence. The demand for realism or naturalism or verisimilitude, the holding up of mirror to nature, is in fact homologous with the conception of allegory: both imply a point by point resemblance between the work of art and its subject; yet if this is the case, it is difficult to see how a work of art can ever say or mean anything, how it is possible for it to convey an attitude or a point of view. Romantic and post-Romantic theories of art do not succeed in escaping from this dilemma: either some kind of correspondence is predicted between the soul of the poet and the external world; or the notion that art is a lamp, illuminating the darkness, and that the poet is a person posessing special visions or insights leads eventually to symbolism and the cutting off of art from any kind of referent. Thus, the mirror/lamp antithesis, put forward as some kind of eternal and ineluctable dichotomy, prevents us from seeing something very obvious: which is that works of art are a form of discourse. They are able to refer to things outside themselves and to significate precisely because the relation is not complete, because it does not have the character of equivalence. There is no necessary antithesis between a realism that has nothing to say and a symbolism that has nothing to talk about; it is the autonomy of *Tristana*, its liberation from a correspondence with actual events, which makes it all the more effective as a comment upon them. These references are not separable from some hypothetical universal human meaning but are absolutely integral to any meaning it can possibly have.

The appositeness of Galdos's novel to Bunuel's purpose is well suggested by the passage cited by Ricardo Munoz Suay in *Cahiers du Cinema* (no 223); a description of Toledo:

'En entrant dans la ville par ce côté, le voyageur oublie qu'il est venue dans un véhicule des temps moderne. Son aspect est celui des villages morts, mort pour ne jamais renaître, sans autre intérêt que les souvenirs, sans espoir d'une vie nouvelle, sans rien qui puisse se développer de nouveau . . .'

In Bunuel's film Toledo becomes an image of old Spain; a fitting setting for the pathology of decrepitude, senescence and decay, Bunuel's study in a dying culture. Doubtless he must have relished the irony by which *Tristana* became an acceptable subject — in J. Francisco Aranda's account:

'it was finally decided that *Tristana* would be the best: Spanish in character and in the problems it dealt with, not too complicated. The author of the original book — a Liberal of the end of the past century — was beginning to be officially praised. His work, till recently considered dangerous was now acceptable with the "new look" the Government wanted to give to their future activities.'

By translating the action of the book from 19th century to the period leading up to the Spanish civil war Bunuel was able to raise the question of the relation of this traditional culture to the development of Fascism, and, in turn, to suggest an unbroken continuity right up to the present. Thus, whatever historians have, or are likely to conclude, it seems highly significant that directors of quite different outlooks from the three main countries in which Fascism became established, Germany, Italy and Spain should have arrived at essentially similar conclusions. The strategy of Straub in *Not Reconciled,* of Bertolucci in *The Spider's Strategy,* of Bunuel in *Tristana,* is to break down the distinction between past and present, to portray Fascism only as the most malignant symptom of a deep-seated disease. In all three pictures Fascism is, as it were, the absent subject — the mystification of presenting it as a purely external force invading a wholly innocent organism (and thus of denying any relation between class, capitalism and the development of Fascism), of melodramatising it, is consequently avoided. In Bunuel's case this is strongly reinforced by the fact that every one of the characters commits his own act of betrayal — though, naturally, without ever noticing it!! The meaning of the action is built, not out of the characters conscious decisions but out of everything that is omitted and passed over: the Spanish political situation. Tristana herself is clearly a symbol of Spain, Don Lope is representative of the traditional class society and of the forces that aligned themselves with Franco, Horacio relates to the anti-bourgeois left, while Saturno figures as a caricature of the Spanish working class. Syntagmic juxta-

positions make this political dimension explicit. Tristana's seduction by Don Lope is immediately followed by shots of sabre carrying policemen pursuing workers. Later her rejection of Saturno's pathetic advances — she condescendingly displays her body — is linked by Bunuel with a shot of the Virgin Mary, as she legitimises her relationship with Don Lope in church in order to gratify the ecclesiastical authorities. Once again authoritarian culture is identified with sexual repression. Again the episode in which Tristana walks with Saturna in the streets of Toledo clearly seems to have political overtones. Their choice of streets is the choice that Spain must herself make politically — one path leads to Horacio — i.e. to the left with its somewhat naive and uncritical idealisation of the peasantry (the two men with a donkey, one in Catalan costume that he is painting), the other path to a policeman who is killing a mad dog i.e. Fascism. Perhaps this juxtaposition also suggests the treatment of Catalonia by Franco's army. Moreover, the fact that construction work is going on in the cloister implies that it is the Fascists who are modernising just as the left is attaching itself to 'the picturesque'. *Land Without Bread* is clear evidence that Bunuel would have no sympathy with any attempt to see Spanish history in those terms.

The return to Lope's house unmistakeably represents the defeat of revolutionary forces in Spain and the acquiescence of Spain in Franco's regime. In the coded language of the film this is due to: the lack of determination on the part of the revolutionary left, the apathy and lack of ideological awareness on the part of the working class (the fact that Saturno is deaf and dumb), the traditionalism of Spain (Tristana's feeling that Don Lope's house is where she belongs), the fatal assumption that the battle was already won. The scenes at Don Lope's are rich in irony and full of sly references back to earlier Bunuel films. The expensive piano on which Tristana plays Chopin's Revolutionary Etude — invokes the piano, symbol of a dying culture, which the hero drags behind him in *L'Age D'Or*. Tristana's confinement in the house recalls the plight of the guests in *The Exterminating Angel*; while Horacio's visits between 4 and 6, recall Belle de Jour's attendance of the brothel between 2 and 5. Tristana's mysterious illness, her loss of a limb becomes a metaphor for contemporary Spain. The amputation refers to the military and police state 'solution' for the problems of a nation that is destroying itself from within.

Thus the movie contains a multiplicity of references to Spanish politics; however, it cannot be interpreted rigidly as an allegory. Bunuel is well aware that individuals cannot adequately stand for whole social classes and to try to achieve In Bunuel's work religious, political and sexual implications are invariably linked: they cannot be regarded as alternative methods of explanation nor can one of these be seen as 'standing for' another. Since the symbol integrates these meanings they cannot be separated in analysis. In *Tristana* the bell is a symbol of Spain's traditional and dying authoritarian culture: it integrates the activities of society, it teaches obedience. It is also associated with sexual repression (the phallic symbolism of the giant clapper that cannot be moved). The image which Tristana sees of Don Lope's head crystallises these implications of death: it points forward to the murder of Lope, it metaphorically conveys the spiritual death which she acquiesces in. Don Lope's head is the death mask of Spain: this concentrated and powerful image condenses at the very start the significance of the whole film.

In *Tristana* Bunuel indicates that his characters live their lives on the basis of a false conception of freedom. Don Lope most characteristically represents the hypocrisy of bourgeois society, where freedom is defined as fully accepting and acquiescing in the actual unfreedom of that society. Thus Don Lope purports to mock the institution of marriage and insists that she should retain her freedom, but he becomes indignant when she begins to act on his advice. All through the film Bunuel shows that such 'freedom' as there is clearly rests on *force majeur* or on class position. Tristana's preference for one street rather than another is not an innocent one, for her preference enters into consideration in a way that Saturna's does not. On the basis of some of Bunuel's other films it should be easy to conclude that the recurrent moments of choice for Tristana, between two peas, between two columns, represent authentic if marginal expressions of freedom — one thinks of Archibaldo's decision not to kill the insect at the end of *The Criminal Life of Archibaldo De la Cruz*. However, the total context of *Tristana* makes it absolutely certain that this is not so. Rather it is a sign that Tristana is unwilling to ever enter into a serious or personal commitment and these moments which she endows with such significance are a form of self deception — they lead to the childlike eagerness with which, as a pampered cripple, she enters into games of chance in the park. This self deception is also prominent in Horacio and Don Lope. Horacio affects to be an artist, a radical and a freethinker but he is objectively unwilling and incapable of standing up to the bourgeoisie. He imagines that it will be enough to overcome Don Lope by symbolic action — by knocking him over — he does not see that gestures alone are not enough and that if he wants Tristana he must fight for her and make a positive commitment. Yet Tristana herself *chooses* the inauthentic, not once, but twice — when she allows Don Lope to be her lover and when she eventually returns to Don Lope's house.

At this point it is probably necessary to draw attention to some of the explicit points of contact between the action and such an equivalence would be to falsify the film in both sides of this relation. The tragedy, or comedy, of *Tristana* is that Bunuel allows his characters the freedom to align themselves with one side or the other. And what we see is not the transformation of society but the transformation of individuals. Don Lope talks of siding with the underdog, when he allows a thief to escape, but he objectively sides with the forces of reaction and spends his last hours in the company of the priests, at whom he has scoffed. Horacio, whose posture of the rebel was never entirely convincing (his prurient reaction to Tristana's disclosures), becomes a respectable, impotent bourgeois. Tristana loses her freshness and innocence and becomes hard, cruel and vindictive. Tristana kills Don Lope — but this action cannot turn back the clock; the failure to choose freedom has been catastrophic. Bunuel has never abandoned the surrealist path: he insists that the choice between liberation and repression is an absolute one and that the failure to make a radical break cannot but have destructive implications.

Food and possessions are important in the picture because they are a more truthful indicator of social differences and real motivations that the utterances of the characters themselves. There is no more striking depiction of the transformation of Don Lope than in the contrast between the scene in which Don Lope allows Tristana to eat the only egg (significantly emphasised by a close-up) and that in which he sits at ease, drinking chocolate with the priests, as they sound him out about his will. It is for the right to eat *marron glacés* rather than the bellringer's humble meal of fried bread that counter-revolutions are made. If the characters of *Tristana* fall, they nevertheless fall comfortably — perhaps the apple which Tristana hands Saturno is an emblem of precisely that.

In the inevitably prosaic task of explication it is difficult to bring out the subtlety of Bunuel's effects and to the poetic density of his mise en scene. The scene in the colonnade is a case in point. Don Lope expounds his false freedom, Tristana hers — yet the costume and hat which she wears, and for which Don Lope has sold his valuable silver, contradict this verbal justification. When Tristana bends over the ecclesiastical statue the colour of her hat perfectly matches the patina of the marble: the image conveys the fact that Tristana chooses death, death against life — and the statue reminds her of Lope's slippers — another symbol of decrepitude, ageing and death. This shot subtly reinforces the image we have already been given — of Lope's decapitated head swinging from the bell tower. *Tristana* is characterised by an intricacy and complexity of reference for which there is simply no parallel in the history of the cinema, yet this is achieved quite unobtrusively, without in any way detracting from the work's directness, clarity and force.

If to the inattentive eye and inaccurate heart Bunuel's theme becomes invisible, if *Tristana* can be praised without even being understood, perhaps, that indicates just how little the lip service paid to art and freedom in contemporary society really signifies: how easy it is to reduce both to insignificance.

David Morse

Distance and Style

the visual rhetoric of Max Ophuls: Letter from an Unknown Woman

Always at one remove. Lisa (Joan Fontaine) confronts Stefan (Louis Jourdan) through a pane of glass . . .

Letter from an Unknown Woman is a "period" film, set as the opening title informs us in Vienna around 1900. Made in Hollywood, it thus leads us to expect sets and costumes faithful to the location and time.

While I can't judge the fidelity of the details of the dress and architecture for want of factual information about that period myself, most viewers will probably agree that the film looks reasonably faithful. However, one cannot help noticing that the sets appear quite unreal; that is, we are very conscious that they are in fact sets. A complete romantic might wish to create a feeling of total indentification on the part of the audience — a sense that we are actually watching Vienna in 1900. Ophuls instead chooses to make us aware that we are watching action occurring on movie sets which are supposed to represent Vienna in 1900.

This is not a deficiency in set design but a conscious element in Ophuls's art. We can see this best perhaps by considering the sets (made by Golitzen to the director's specifications) in the context of Ophuls's thematic concerns. Love, which runs like a main theme throughout his work, is seen in his films precisely in the context of its loss. His films are made from a positon where all possibilities of a full-blooded, real, sensual experience has passed, where total romantic union of viewer with object or of lover with lover is impossible. It is more than simply an acquiescence to Hollywood convention that is at work when he films the first truly sensual embrace between Lisa and Stefan in a frame which grows successively darker, making their forms like silhouettes, until it finally fades out — or, more accurately, transforms itself into the net shot, which is of a blank curtain.

Ophuls's frames ,then, like the sets within them, appear to the viewer not in terms of the immedate perception of the truth of the frames' world (cf. Borzage) but as consciously constructed entities, whose very construction is an essential element of the film. *Letter from an Unknown Woman* is one of his most cluttered works. Every frame is replete with an extraordinary density of objects in the foreground and the background, often partially obscurng a character from view; of shadows, panes of glass, reflections. The effect is to prevent the viewer from feeling that he is watching some real world of the past, and to make him aware instead of the frames *as* constructions, as a created art.

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Another way of describing this effect is by calling it cinematic distance. The feeling that we are watching a created film prevents us from achieving a true union with the action; thus specific elements which help create that feeling also endistance us from that action. The whole sequence of scenes describing Lisa's first acquaintance with Stefan is conceived of in terms of various forms of distance. The first sight we have of her in the film is from behind a harp, her face visible through the strings. She is watching Stefan's things being moved into her building. Ophuls next shows her listening to him playing the piano by panning a shot of his window with music coming from it, to a shot of her on a swing, seen between two branches of a tree's trunk. In these shots, there are two kinds of distance working. Through her eyes, we are coming to know Stefan not through his actual physical presence but only through the presence of things connected with him. (This idea is continued in the sequence in which she sneaks into his appartment and looks around his rooms at his possessions.) Further, as viewers of the film, we are coming to see Lisa also in terms of distance — through harps, or behind tree trunks. In both cases, objects in the frame take on reality as great as, or greater than, that of the characters.

Similar elements take on a directness of expression which in certain respects reminds one of the film of Douglas Sirk. In one scene of Lisa listening to Stefan playing from outside his room, she manages to get a glimpse of his hands reflected in the partially opened window. When she sees him for the first time, she is standing behind a glass door, separated from him by the panes. Again, when she comes out of his apartment (in the scene mentioned above) she sees her mother kissing an older man on the stairs below. This sudden sight has a kind of jarring shock — almost as if this vision of her mother (herself, perhaps, in twenty years) mocks her own romanticization of Stefan. This is made clearer when her mother, explaining how even at her age she can love a man, says that "later" Lisa will come to understand these things.

But Ophuls is not Sirk, and none of these examples have the kind of devastating unlimited power imparted to similar occurences in a film like *The Tarnished Angels*. Instead, Ophuls prevents any single element from dominating the film's form by creating a marvellous continuity of character and object, background and foreground, event and action. His frames are not rigidly static, they do not separate objects from objects or setting from character. No part of the

. . . sighs for him through the wrought iron gates . . .

frame is allowed to assume a singular or fixed function or meaning. Late in the film, there is a shot of Lisa and Johann entering their house, which begins in a long shot looking down at them in the distance coming from the hallway, with various objects filling the foreground. As they and the camera move closer together, the camera pans following them further, until they are in the foreground in front of a wall whose furniture and other details are now in the background. The shot began with objects in the foreground, appearing to dominate the frame, and ends with characters in the foreground, changing place with the objects, and a new set of objects replacing the characters in the background. (There are numerous similar shots throughout the film.)

Ophuls's objects, we have said, sets, lighting, the whole world of his frames, appear false or constructed. The Vienna streets and buildings look almost like painted cardboard; the street-lamps like papier mâché, the snow like false white powder. The frames' endless details and endistancings suggest that this falseness is Ophuls's representation of the impossibility of sensual love. The narrative, as in so many of his films, poses a situation in which such a love is seen at the outset to be lost. As in *Lola Montez,* the flashback form provides another kind of distance — seeing love enclosed by a present situation which renders its recurrence impossible. In the "present" of *Letter from an Unknown Woman,* Lisa is already dead, and Stefan hopelessly dissipated. The "falseness" of the frames seems perfectly to represent a state in which all physical feeling has been drained from the world. One feels Ophuls's objects not so much as real full-blooded presences but as shadows of some former real self, as the skin or surface-appearance of something whose real essence has long since fled, leaving behnd only its unsensual shell. This is why curtains or panes of glass in all his frames create a feeling of architecture or sculpture, as if their details were carvings on some stone. Each object or character is like a little ornament or rill, but the film itself posits no central shape on which the ornaments might be carved; rather, it is made up of such ornaments. When the characters are shown in static shots, or moving through a continuity of these ornaments, they appear to have a meaning and function in the frame no different from the inanimate objects, which are themselves unsensual shadows. This is Ophuls's visual expression of the state in which love is long lost and impossible.

But by virtue of the *continuous nature* of his visual field, Ophuls indicates that his conception of impossibility and distance allow these concepts none of the rigid and terrible fixity that they can assume in Sirk. In fact, despite his continual use of endistancing devices, Ophuls might be called romantic, although his romanticism is of a very special sort. What he does is to take his created sense of falseness, his clutter of inanimate details, and, through the use of various forms of continuity, make the viewer come to accept it on a level more immediate than that of simply being aware of its unreality. Within the context of this awareness, he is able to create a feeling for, even a belief in, his sets, his characters' feelings, as "real" things. Which is to say that in the context of a love long rendered impossible by time, he is nonetheless able to make one believe in the existence of some form of love, of the presence of at least a convincing illusion of such a love within the frames; in the context of a world which is clearly constructed, he is able to make us believe that on some level, it is "real" and that we may identify with it.

This romanticism has many forms and materializations — the continuity of the visual field, the use of long single takes, the use of camera movements to follow the characters, or to move around them. Its most obvious representation in *Letter from an Unknown Woman,* and perhaps in all of Ophuls, is the sequence in the make-believe train car. Ophuls introduces the scene by cutting to a shot which has Lisa and Stefan facing each other in the train compartment, with a landscape going by in the window between them; the camera moves back from them and the landscape, revealing the landscape as "false", as a painting of the countryside which, we discover later, is mounted on a roller turned by an old man pedalling. After this initial shot, Ophuls begins to cut between a shot of Lisa and one of Stefan as they talk to one another, with different parts of the painted background visible in the window in each shot. This scene, like most in the film, goes far beyond our simple awareness of the background, and hence the entire action, as "false" or "un-physical". What is crucial is that we *know* from the outset that the background is painted rather than real, just as we "know" that Lisa is alread dead in the film's present tense. Every shot inside the train compartment attempts to go beyond this awareness to make the viewer feel that the train window background, which he will always objectively know to be false, is in some sense real. If Ophuls simply wished to present the background as a false background, he would have shot the scene in a single take, which would have been quite consistent with other scenes in the film. This would have presented the passing countryside as no more or no less than it is. Instead, he begins close to it, calling our attention to it as if he were stating initially its nature, and then shamelessly pulls back to reveal more of the compartment; then proceeding to cut between shots which show only parts of the scene through the train window. The effect is to treat the painted background not as an illusion whose reality as an illusion must be preserved by avoiding any jarring cutting, but paradoxically as a "real" background. A single take would have rendered a different impression, perhaps causing the viewer to think that Ophuls was aiming to expose the falseness of romanticism. The cutting, on the other hand, gives the impression that he does not see that falseness at all. The scene is cut just as the scene in a real train compartment would be, with no fear for the "fragility" of an illusion which might be disrupted if the position in the frame were altered. This is a far stronger or more romantic position, a building from sets which are consciously sets, towards a feeling not for the falseness but for the imaginative construction which they represent as a primary feeling, whether you choose to call it reality or illusion, of the film. The sense of Ophuls's images as visibly constructed entities has the effect of denying a certain primary physicality (our awareness of the construction) in the interests of creating an illusion within that very imaginative illusion.

During the train ride sequence, Stefan emerges from the train to request the backdrop for another country. We follow him outside the train, see the woman he pays for another trip, see her calling "Switzerland" to the man who is running it, and see the man lowering the drop for Switzerland and begin to pedal. Throughout all this, the backdrops are visible; we see Switzerland being lowered and see it start to move as the pedalling begins. This would seem to deny the illusion which the cutting within the department built up. In fact, rather than denying it, it expands it. It is important to remember that while inside the compartment we never lost our awareness that the background was in fact a painted drop. Ophuls's showing of all the mechanics by which that background was made to go by the train window — and following this by showing it actually going by again — is a metaphor for a process which occurs on a deeper level throughout his films. He shows us his sets as sets, his objects as mere props, and simultaneously shows us a process whereby he creates a feeling that these things are "real". We are always aware of seeing this illusion, this

feeling of the reality of the construction, in the process of being created. In the train sequence, Ophuls shows us both the illusion and the manner in which it is created, in a single scene; by seeing its creation, we come to believe in the reality of the illusion, although never believing that the drawings of the landscapes are real things. Ophuls knows we could never accept drawings as a physical, three dimensional world; rather than trying to falsely lull us into such a belief, he creates a situation in which their reality as a set is clearly visible; seeing that reality, we can accept the conscious construction for what it is.

The scene that follows is remarkably similar. Lisa and Stefan are dancing on an empty floor, the only couple left, to music played by a small band. The initial effect created is that their relationship, their love, carries through beyond the time when other couples have gone, and that the music will provide for itself, will continue from its hidden surce to 'accompany" the dancing, subjugating itself to the illusion of their love. But Ophuls immediately shows us the musicians, talking among themselves about being sick of staying so late, and declaring their intention of going home after the present number, which they do. The effect is not to mock or reduce to pathos Lisa and Stefan's dancing, but to show the means by which it was made possible. We are not lulled into accepting any factual false illusion ("the music will subjugate itself to their love"), but rather into accepting the feeling that the beauty comes from the conscious construction of the situation. Ophuls is not a romantic who believes that romanticism can triumph over everything, but rather one who seeks to find the beauty of an illusion within the realistic context which he knows encloses everything. Lisa is already dead, so any love she can have is already doomed. Lola Montez is in the circus, and her entire life is seen in the context of her being a sidehow oddity; just as the fat lady is fat, so Lola Montez had lovers. The sets are no more than sets; any illusion, any feeling, must occur in this context.

He builds up to such feelings by many methods. The continuity of the visual field, already mentioned, within the lateral and perspectival dimension of the frame prevents us from feeling that there are any fixed geometrical tensions or other visual dynamic elements at work. The profusion of objects is nothing more than a profusion of objects, with equal force and recurrence everywhere in the images. This creates a sense of interconnection, a feeling that the positions and angles can be altered without the meaning being effected, as in the shot of Lisa and Johann entering which was described earlier. Consequently, while every object works towards representing the loss of sensual feeling, no single object embodies the loss precisely: the objects never refer back to, dominate, or inform on the meanings of one another. Hence the continuity leads the viewer into accepting it as a kind of reality, much as he accepts the continuity of a false background which continues its motion despite the cutting in the train sequence.

It is well known that this continuity applies best to Ophuls's use of camera movements, particularly of his long takes. On numerous occasions, the camera follows the people as they walk and talk to one another, stops with them and changes direction as they do. Following them through a changing background of objects further belies the notion that Ophuls's objects deny reality to the characters' feelings. In such camera movements, the continuity of the movement matches the continuity of feeling which the single take allows to build up. The long single take in Ophuls's most direct expression of the building up of a romantic feeling despite whatever larger context the film seems to establish. True to the classical theories, the longer the take, the stronger the illusion grows, the more intoxicating the camera movements become; (whereas the cuts seem to disrupt such continuity, placing the feelings in another context).

Ophuls's camera does not merely follow the characters; he pans from one part of a setting to another, moves around objects, moves around characters. As Lisa finishes her letter, the camera moves round a lamp without cutting, sustaining the devastating feeling of her words at the same time that its movement seems to impose some order on the emotions of the scene which adds to or complements those words rather than disrupting them. In short, once one accepts his use of false sets and the "unphysicality" of his frames, a large part of Ophuls's style can be seen to be directed at the sustenance of feeling, the maintenance of an emotional continuity of illusion.

Hand in hand with this ability to maintain the illusion (which we must distinguish very carefully) is an opposing desire to *place* that illusion in a more formal context. A good deal of this is done through the cutting. If single takes in Ophuls are meant to maintain illusion, the cutting disrupts it, breaking the dream, and imposing a more structured order on the action. His cutting is not fixed in a dialectical or structural way like Eisenstein's, but rather a recognition that life in fact has form and structure, that relationships between people are not all love but have their mechanics too; that the dance cannot go on for ever, for eventually the musicians will go home. The use of cutting also works to some extent against the spatial continuity of the frame (itself an aspect of romanticism), by breaking the geography of the scene up into fixed angles and points of view. When Ophuls can cut between profiles of two people showing some of the same background in each shot, as in the train car with the false backdrop, the illusion is maintained by the continuity of the background; when he has to cut between head-on shots which have the camera pointing in opposite directions in scenes in which two people are facing one another, and thus showing little or no common background, the illusion is broken. It is no accident that such cutting is used at moments in the narrative for which it is well suited — Lisa's mother telling of her coming marriage, or Stefan's departure for Milan on the train. As the romance of Lisa's love appears to break apart, Ophuls uses such fragmented cutting, representing the disruption of that continuity.

Another use of cutting, particularly of cutting in conjunction with certain unusual camera angles, is connected with Ophuls's sense of fate. So far I have not asked the question why love is not possible. I have not asked it because in Ophuls it is largely irrelevant. The

. . . bids her son farewell from behind her veil.

reason given for Lisa's not seeing Stefan again — she says "I wanted to be one woman you had known who asked you for nothing" — is not exactly a convincing pretext for such devastation. To a certain extent, one must accept the impossibility of love as given; like the unreality of the sets, Ophuls does not seek to explain it but to explore its implications. But there are references, here and in other of his films, to some cruel kind of fate which has a hand in the denial. There are several in the script: early in the film, Lisa says (in her letter) "What happened to us had its own reason beyond our poor understanding"; and later, describing her feelings about her apparently chance meeting with Stefan at the opera, "I know now nothing happens by chance. Every moment is measured, every step is counted." In fact the entire form of the film as a flashback, is manifestly fatalistic. The sense of an arbitrary order beyond the characters' powers of comprehension is most strongly expressed in the cutting and in certain camera angles.

The most obvious and striking sequence relevant here is the amazing repetition of the balcony shot when Lisa and Stefan enter his house for the first time. Earlier, Lisa had seen Stefan entering with a girl and laughing flirtatiously with her from a position on a landing several floors up; the camera panned as her eyes followed them up the stairs. Lisa had been waiting to offer herself to him, having run away from her parents who wanted to take her to Linz; seeing him with a girl, she concludes there is nothing there for her and dutifully decides to go with her parents after all. Later, she returns to Vienna, begins seeing him again and is very happy; once he takes her home for the first time and Ophuls films this from exactly the same position on the balcony, panning following them just as he did earlier with the other couple. The difference is that the first shot was a point-of-view shot from no one's position, since the landing is empty. It has a kind of fatalism, a sense of foreboding, that is borne out well by the story; for after they enter and sleep together, Lisa becomes pregnant and loses all contact with Stefan. On several occasions during the film, Ophuls takes the camera to a place which would make a fine point-of-view shot, except that there is no one there watching the action. For instance, Lisa and Stefan first come to a restaurant seen by the camera inside the restaurant looking through a window; the camera pans with them as they walk past the windows and in the door, remaining inside the restaurant all the time.

Letter from an Unknown Woman is full of many connecting themes, undercurrents, unstated implications, some of which I have attempted to elucidate. It is, finally, a triumph of style as style, of consciously created style as a metaphor for feelings that are as "romantic" as those aimed at by less self-aware practitioners of the genre. The paradox is that Ophuls's distancing devices, his cool awareness of the "ideology" of the romantic convention should allow this (it is only his second American film.). The achievement defines Ophuls as an artist: the sense of fate, of lost love, exists not as some literary content, but in the very play of the film's style — i.e., literally, as its mise-en-scene. The desolation throughout, becoming stronger at certain moments, is its own beauty. A final instance: the barrenness of the restaurant where Stefan had first taken Lisa — earlier, it was full of people, now as she looks at him once again after many years it is almost empty — is like a metaphor for the final passage of feeling and life from the world. In this sense it is very close to the end of the Bavarian episode of *Lola Montez,* with the desolate palace and distant sounds of revolution. One might say that the film's primary state, what it presents as the real present, is represented by the very beginning and closing scenes, in which Stefan prepares to duel Johann, who apparently thinks Lisa is still with him. The lighting is dark and sparse, and conversations are unstressed, muted, without feeling. In Ophuls it is only when surrounded by such a 'frame' that any sense of love occurs.

Fred Camper

"... I want to confess.. I killed a man" *Phillips Holmes in* Broken Lullaby.

muted strings: Ernst Lubitsch's Broken Lullaby

Today both the intrinsic quality and the historical importance of Lubitsch's achievement are almost universally recognized. But there is no critical consensus as to specific works. A case in point is *Broken Lullaby* (or *The Man I Kliled*, 1932), which tends to be highly regarded by more content-conscious critics, but which has been described by Andrew Sarris as "Lubitsch's least inspired and most calculated effort" in the thirties, "all surface effect, all ritualistic piety toward a 'noble' subject."

According to Sarris, Lubitsch was a "comic talent" who went astray when he tried his hand at serious, "humorless" material.[1] I believe, on the contrary, that *Broken Lullaby* is a remarkable film in itself; that it is not as foreign to the Lubitsch corpus as is widely believed, and has many features in common with the comiedies;[2] finally, that it is certainly far from being a "humorless' film.

The opening sequences of *Broken Lullaby* are truly stunning and endowed in Paris on November 11, 1919, the first anniversary of Armstice Day. Soldiers march up the Champs-Elysées toward the Arc of Triumph to the sound of cheering crowds and a military band. Shots of the pageant are framed by the leg and stump of a one-legged veteran. From the strident crowds the camera suddenly tracks to a sign which reads "Silence — Hospital"; Lubitsch then cuts to a shot of the inside of the hospital, and a wounded soldier screams that he cannot stand the din any longer. The second part of the prologue takes place inside a church where a Te Deum is being sung to commemorate the recent victory. The camera tracks up the nave along glistening sabres jutting out of the pews. While a text is read out about "Peace" the camera lingers on the bulky holster of a revolver; as soon as the reading is over the whole congregation is seen to stand up and move out in brisk, efficient way; they are all soldiers and put their helmets back on their heads before they leave the church. The church is now empty except for the presence of a dove-like thing on the back of one of the pews, it is impossible to make out what is is until the camera moves closer and shows this "thing" to be a man's hands clasped in desperate prayer, the man himself (Philipps Holmes) is then seen kneeling or rather sunk behnd the bench. A tortured look on his face, he comes up to a priest wandering in the back of the church. "I want to confess, I killed a man," Holmes says. The priest looks horrified, takes Holmes to a confessional. Holmes explains: "It was during the war. He was a German soldier . . ." The priest's face relaxes, he replies in almost cheerful manner: "Then you did only your duty! Don't think of it any more . . ."

Thus a number of statements are being made in a predominantly visual way. Firstly, for the Parisian crowd, the horrors of the war are forgotten, drowned out in a frantic celebration, but the spectator is reminded of these horrors all the more forcefully as they are enhanced by the effect of anti-thesis (the one-legged veteran, the hospital). Secondly, the celebration of "Peace" is really a celebration of war, for it takes the form of essentially military ceremonial: a pageant, a churchful of heavily armed, helmeted soldiers (the visuals consistently contradicting the soundrack with its mentions of "Peace"). Thirdly, Lubitsch stresses the collusion between the powers that be of Church and Army, the Church is seen as giving over both its buildings and personnel to the miltary celebration, even religious "values" (to do one's duty, not to kill) are subservient to war-mongering nationalism. As for Phillips Holmes, he is shown as completely isolated from his fellow-Frenchmen, but tragically similar to "the man he killed". In a flashback, he remembers the war. He is seen in the trenches, killing with his bayonet a young German soldier who stares at him. The German was writing a letter in which he asks why he should kill Frenchmen, since he spent two years in Paris and loved French people. The letter is completed and will be forwarded by Holmes; the sequence closes with a shot of a book on Beethoven (belonging to the dead German) to a Beethovian crescendo. Holmes in his alienation finds no comfort in the sophistic solace of the Church. The priest is well-nigh farcical not only in his early refusal to recognize Holmes' moral problem, but also later on, when he approves of Holmes' plan to go to Germany and ask forgiveness of the dead German's mother. It is clear that the priest, havng made up his mind that he is dealing with a fanatic, a madman, is above all trying to get rid of him when he encourages him to go, showing him a picture of a *Pietà* in the back of the church and explaining: "She forgave, so *his* mother will forgive you, too." Therefore the overture is informed by Lubitsch's use of black humour which emphasizes the gulf between Holmes's idealism and military/religious realism, and also achieves the effect of having the spectator believe in Holmes's far-fetched predicament. Both the unrelenting tempo and the extreme quality of the individual segments establish the film's own credibility and set it firmly in melodrama.

Afterwards, the tempo of the film is allowed to relax, it meanders, its atmosphere both sentimental and humorous, now and again regaining the dramatic quality of the overture, but never to the same paroxysmal degree. Beside the evident aspect of structure, one of the reasons for this change is that we have moved to Germany, the country of the vanquished, where people are not drunk on victory, but tend to remember and tentatively learn how to live again. The basic plot has Phillips Holmes (Paul Renard) introduce himself to the German's parents and fiancée (the Hölderlins and Elsa), find it impossible to tell them the true motive of his visit and tell them instead that he used to be a friend of Walter when they were both musical students in Paris, before the war. Gradually Paul comes to occupy the place left vacant by the dead son in the Hölderlin home and in the fiancée's heart. He tells her the truth, but she decides that he must stay for the sake of Walter's parents. Finally she admits to loving him without any such reservations.

It is perhaps not necessary to linger on the melodramatic implications of the plot. Basic to the structure of many melodramas is the device whereby one character replaces another person whom he has previously harmed. This device is present here (Paul Renard replacing, actually becoming "the man he killed" for Walter's fiancée and parents) as in, say, Douglas Sirk's *Magnificent Obsession* (Rock Hudson replacing, becoming Dr. Phillips, for whose death he had been responsible). This device can be seen as another example of the literalness of the melodramatic spirit:[3] redemption has to be total and literal, a "buying back". In *Magnificent Obsession,* the shift of characters is made possible by the fact that both men are doctors: (at any rate, Rock Hudson had been a medical student); in *Broken Lullaby,* by the fact that they are both musicians. In Lubitsch's film, Walter and Paul are mirror images of each other, since what they have in common (a love of music) can be broken up into German music (the book on Beethoven, Schumann's *Träumerei*) and French training (Walter's studies in Paris). In other words, the basic melodramatic pattern of reversibility corresponds, on the human level, to the pacifist, intenrationalist message of the film. The film's progression consists in making explicit the implicit assimilation of Walter and Paul. The assimilation is already hinted at in the flashback of the trenches; it becomes complete when Nancy Carroll (Elsa) tells Paul that if he leaves the Hölderlins, it will be like "killing Walter a second time".

Lubitsch displays dazzling virtuosity in controlling the emotions of the audience, having them run all the gamut from pathos to farce, sometimes through very swift changes. One recurrent pattern is from conventional emotion to original comic touch and then back to heightened emotion. Thus, the opening scene of the German part of the film takes place in the graveyard where Mrs. Hölderlin meets another woman who is also visiting her son's grave. Mrs. Hölderlin mentions that her neighbour's son would often come and eat her cakes. Her friend wonders at this, she did so much baking herself. "What is your recipe"? she asks. "So much butter . . . two cups of sugar." "Oh, *two* cups of sugar! I'll know better next time . . ." and she bursts into tears. A similar incident occurs later at the Hölderlin family table. After a gloomy beginning, Lionel Barrymore (Dr. Hölderlin) tries to cheer up, states that beer still tastes good, etc. Everybody joins in, until finall somebody exclaims: "You'd hardly know there had been a war!" Back to brooding silence and sadness. In both these instances, humour is not used to relieve the dramatic tension, but on the contrary to heighten it unexpectedly. In this way, a kind of *emotional suspense* is gradually built up. Elsewhere the comic and the pathetic are juxtaposed rather than dialectically united. Members of the older generation, including Schultz (Lucien Littlefield), Elsa's ridiculous would-be lover, are gathered together at the Gasthof, downing beers. A young man is seated by himself at a nearby table. Schultz's jealousy masquerades as patriotism, he gives vent to his disgust at the Hölderlins for keeping a Frenchman as their guest. He hints that Paul may well be a spy ,and, to make his point, solemnly asks: "He keeps his violin-case locked, I tell you, what is in his violin-case?" The young man then dryly remarks: "Maybe a violin." Lionel Barymore comes in and orders a round of beer. Schultz ostentatiously refuses his beer, others follow suit. Barrymore then orders "one beer" in a loud voice (a further comic touch), and gives a dignified speech on the responsibilities of the older generation, who remained safely at home while they sent off young boys to be butchered on the front. The young man then stands up to shake Lionel Barrymore's hand; he has lost a leg in the war and walks on crutches. Lionel Barrymore steps out of the restaurant, looks at the town gate through which soldiers used to leave to the cheers of the crowds; their steps are heard and fade on the soundtrack. By the arch of the gate is a memorial plaque to the war dead. This sequence therefore echoes the opening of the film in Paris: cheering crowds in France, the memory of cheering crowds in Germany; a one-legged German in the café; the Arch of Triumph and the village Tor.

There are further instances when comic touches do not add to the emotional impact. Noteworthy is the gag of

Resolution through music ... Paul plays Walter's violin.

the dress ("confidentially, made in France") whose price goes up as the salesman watches the progress of the romance between Phillips Holmes and Nancy Carroll. To a similar vein (the gently satiric depiction of small-town Germany) belongs the symphony of shop doorbells which punctuates the lovers' walk through town as all shopkeepers and customers step out of their shops to watch. Finally, there is the scene (which follows the one previously described of the restaurant) in which Schultz decides to come up to Paul and irritate him by telling him in lusty undertones (which in fact have the ring of sincerity) about pretty girls in gay Paris. But the other customers, Schultz's friends, are incensed that he should even consider even consider addressing the Frenchman. They call him back by shouting a stentorian and reproachful "Schultz!" which in retrospect is made even funnier by its systematic use in *To Be or Not To Be* (Sig Ruman blaming his orderly, "Schultz", for all his own mistakes, up to and including his own suicide).

The use of doors in Lubitsch comedies has often been remarked and commented upon. In *Trouble in Paradise* in particular (doubtlessly one of Lubitsch's major and most perfect films), doors play a part as important as many of the characters and increase our understanding of the situation, whilst at the same time they contribute to the stylistic cohesion of the film (through ambiguity and understatement) and to the pervasive humour. This use of doors is also to be found in *Broken Lullaby,* both as a humoristic device (the symphony of doorbells) and as a dramatic device, as a pause and punctuation. Always kept closed is the door to Walter's room, a kind of sanctuary where time stands still (this is paradoxically underlined by Dr. Hölderlin's winding up of the clock in this room: time has stopped in an everlasting present, which makes it possible for Dr. Hölderlin to hold on to the illusion that Walter may come back any minute. But then Dr. Hölderlin is vindicated by the end of the film, when it becomes clear that Walter has come back — in Paul's guise — after all). After the scene of Paul's "confession" to Elsa, Paul slams the door shut and leaves Elsa alone in the sanctuary: the brutal shutting of the door, like the closing of a coffin lid, is Phillips Holmes's last attempt at rejecting the role of Walter, at challenging the melodramatic logic which forces him to *be* Walter since he killed Walter. Later, when Elsa has told Mrs. Hölderlin that Paul would always stay with them, she closes the door to talk to Paul. Now the meaning is reversed, since Paul has in a sense become a prisoner, but also because at the same time he is behind the same door as Elsa — an intimation of the happy ending which is to follow.

This ending is an appropriate coda, which, like the overture, stands out from the rest of the film — not that it is "better", but because its rhetorical function is underlined rather than underrated. Phillips Holmes plays the violin (Schumann's *Träumerei,* a lullaby); he uses Walter's violin, not his own. There is a close shot of Nancy Carroll's face coming nearer to Holmes's; she smiles to him. He smiles back. She goes to the piano, unlocks it and starts accompanying him on the piano. The editing emphasizes the newly reborn unity of the family cell, shots of the Hölderlin parents (on the sofa, ecstatically listening to the music and smiling at their "children" 's happiness) alternate with shots of the musicians. This reconstitution of the family cell solves an earlier (implicit) conflict between the claims of different generations. Dr. Hölderlin had stated in the restaurant that he wanted to take part of the younger generation, whereas Elsa had told Paul that he must stay because "it's them, the parents, we have to think of". At the end, Paul (Walter reincarnate) stays not just for "them", but also for "her" and therefore for himself — for the sake of both the old generation and the new. A basic structure which is highly conventional (and hardly characteristic of Lubitsch) is translated into Lubitschian terms by the peculiar form it is given. That this form should be musical is not unexpected; it is fitting both because of the inherent musical quality of melo-drama and because music provides, as I said earlier, a bond between Walter and Paul (similarly, in *Magnificent Obsession* Bob Merrick and Helen Phillips are finally reunited through his accomplishment as a surgeon). But in the context of Lubitsch's *oeuvre*, the scene is also endowed with unmistakeable sexual innuendo. The key here, so to speak, is the fact that the piano was locked, therefore functions as an emblem of Elsa's repressed sexuality (similarly, Paul's violin-case was locked, and he uses Walter's): the "Broken Lullaby" is thus resumed in more than one sense. In other Lubitsch films (e.g. *The Smiling Lieutenant*), the reference to a piano and violin duet is clearly sexual; seen from this point of view, *Broken Lullaby* reveals itself not just a powerful pacifist tract, but also a film whose style and theme (the smooth resolution of sexual inhibitions) are closely related to Lubitsch's *oeuvre* as a whole. It will also be noted that *Broken Lullaby* appears to belong firmly in an American tradition illustrated by Leo McCarey in particular (see *Ruggles of Red Gap,* also with Zasu Pitts and Lucien Littlefield, *Make Way for Tomorrow, The Awful Truth* or *My Favorite Wife*). This may be partly due to the very American quality of the interpreters (notably Lionel Barrymore and Zasu Pitts, who plays the Hölderlins' maid), but also certainly to Lubitsch's genius as an entertainer.[4] As such he was able to turn a work of apparently basically European origins (a Maurice Rostand play) and preoccupations into a thoroughly *American* film — that is to say characterized by a technical and stylistic smoothness (here mention must be made of Victor Milner's photography) and also by qualities of rhetorical symbolism not as readily found in European treatments of the subject (cf. Renoir's *Grand Illusion*). Finally, it should be pointed out that if *Broken Lullaby* is far from being "humorless", Lubitsch comedies are equally far from being devoid of emotion: witness Kay Francis's character in *Trouble in Paradise*, the Shylock tirade in *To Be or Not to Be,* or the elegiac mood of *Heaven Can Wait.*

Jean-Loup Bourget

Notes

1 Andrew Sarris: "Lubitsch in the Thirties" — Part One, *Film Comment* vol. 7, no. 4 (New York, Winter 1971–72).

2 It should be borne in mind that the script of *Broken Lullaby* was written by Ernest Vaida and Samson Raphaelson, also responsible (either together or separately) for the scripts of *The Smiling Lieutenant, Trouble in Paradise, The Merry Widow, Angel . . .*

3 See my review of Borzage's *Seventh Heaven* in *Monogram* no. 4 (1972)

4 Cf. Jean Domarchi: "L'homme de partout", *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 198 (Paris, February 1968).

Interview Ruy Guerra

Thomas Elsaesser

Fortunately there is no need to introduce Ruy Guerra. Even though his first film, Os Cafajestes *has never been publicly shown in this country, and though* Sweet Hunters *met almost everywhere an uncomprehending because unprepared audience,* Os Fuzis *was immediately recognized to be a landmark and turning point. It also succeeded in achieving the seemingly impossible: to present a fiction that is unambiguously political in its impact, articulated by means of a linear narrative that loses none of its dialectical logic for being cast in the mould of strict documentation.*

Using behavioural realism against itself, so to speak, in order to demonstrate the inescapably social nature and class character of apparently spontaneous behaviour or of an emotional gesture, Guerra has been able to work within the mainstream tradition of the fiction film, while radically subverting the ideological context of that tradition. His films do not stop at reinstating the political dimension which Western narrative art over the past two centuries had carefully eliminated from its psychological and interpersonal picture of human existence, but — conscious no doubt of his responsibility towards the Latin-American civilization which he made his second home — he attempts to create, notably in The Gods and the Dead, *the necessary climate of action and imagination where magical and mythological forces can assume the role of shaping values and structuring moral responses, thereby indicating determinants which any political analysis ignores at its peril. To us, the work of Ruy Guerra is exemplary because he stands in the front-line of directors capable of making the narrative cinema yield a complex and analytical filmic discourse.*

"OS CAFAJESTES',

Your first film was called Os Cafajestes. *What exactly does the title mean?*

The word is difficult to translate. A "cafajeste" is somebody who flouts accepted moral values, who attacks a given morality by his anti-social or criminal behaviour. "Cafajestada" refers to a mean and nasty trick.

Can you say a little more about the social background of the "cafajestes" in your film, because it seems that the actual dramatic conflict hinges very much on social and class differences.

That's quite correct. The plot is really about an attempt at blackmail which doesn't come off. One of the guys, played by Jece Valadao, is a typical "cafajeste", he belongs to the urban proletariat, and he goes round in a borrowed American car, so that he can at least pretend he is something better. He needs the car as a status symbol for his trade as a blackmailer. The "cafajestes" at a certain time were almost a group with their own codes of behaviour, dress, places they hung out in Rio. The interesting thing is that from a sociological point of view, their origins were very heterogenous, there were young louts and layabouts who didn't have regular jobs, there were professional criminals, pimps, but also millionaires, play-boys, sons of the upper bourgeoisie. A lot of people who had somehow not managed to enter the circles of the old landed aristocracy. Oddly enough their aggressiveness and violence was almost always directed against women — either prostitutes, or women from the haute bourgeoisie. Most of these guys were very good-looking and had chances with women anyway, but they often picked them up just for the fun of humiliating them in front of the gang. A "cafajeste" was something of a specialist in knowing the emotional and sexual hang-ups of women from a certain social class and he was able to exploit them. The "cafajeste" in my film is determined to make the blackmail work because he wants to buy the car, so that he can mix with polite society and wouldn't have to hang round cafes any more. For him the car is a way of climbing socially.

What is the relation between him and his friend who takes the photographs?

The friend comes from a different social milieu, the bourgeoisie, he is weak and he obviously admires the casual ruthlessness of the other man and goes along with him. One thing one must bear in mind is the role of the beach in these circles. The beach democratizes enormously. People go to the beach in the morning and stay there until nightfall. It isn't segregated, it's open and accessible to everyone, and a lot of young men, many from the interior of the country, who come to the city to find work end up on the beach, because if they are good-looking they can make a living as

professional male prostitutes and hustlers. Again, that gives them a certain social mobility, they get invited to fashionable parties.

What about the two girls?

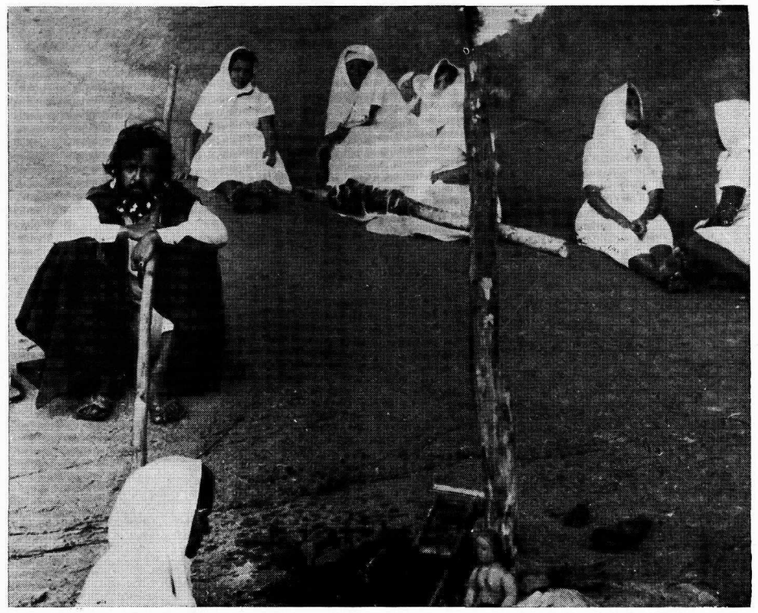
They, too, come from different classes. One of them, played by Normal Benguel, is pretty well the exact counterpart of the "cafajeste", with only one difference that she has made it, or so the guy thinks when he tries to blackmail her, because she is the mistress of a rich bourgeois, her "uncle". And the other girl is the cousin of the guy who takes the photos, she is a well looked-after, sheltered girl, with a taste for adventure. The men are the aggressors, as it were, they take the initiative, but in the long run they are shown up by the women who are both morally and emotionally stronger. Even when the women are the victims, they unmask the men in the process of being victimized, and this often defines the psychological relation between the sexes.

The film begins with the humiliation of a prostitute by the "cafajeste" who takes her home in his car and then throws her out at 2 am, so that she gets picked up by the police. Again, the central scene in the film is the humiliation of the girl when the "cafajeste" takes to the beach, and after seducing her, he takes away her clothes, so that they photograph her in the nude and use the pictures for blackmail. In what sense does she feel degraded by this?

She is being humiliated, but not because she's being photographed in the nude. What is humiliating to her is that despite the mutual degradation, she really did feel a certain deep affection for the guy, perhaps because she recognizes how alike they both are. She gives herself to him quite spontaneously, full well knowing what kind of person he is. On the other hand, she is strong enough as a woman — and beautiful enough — not to feel disgraced by being seen naked.

What comes across very strongly in Os Cafajestes *is the sense that the characters are imprisoned in their social situation as well as in their very limited awareness of themselves. Their only course of action seems to be to torment and exploit each other emotionally, in a rather savage manner, yet this nonetheless makes up their day-to-day reality and determines their outlook and their reactions.*

Yes, and it is also the way they express whatever tenderness and affection they feel. Personally, I don't see a rigid division between good and evil in emotions and actions. The moral value of the characters depends very much on their motivation at a particular moment, the actual circumstances. In a sense, all the characters in *Os Cafajestes* are "degraded", but that is simply their primary condition, as it were, and it is only within this condition that good and evil take on any moral significance. Similarly, the character of the "Gaucho" in *Os Fuzis* is morally speaking a bastard, he cheats the unemployed peasants of their money, he enjoys humilating the father who is forced to sell his daughter, but as the



Resignation and hope . . . superstition portrayed in Os Fuzis

film progresses, other sides of him also become apparent, he comes to realize how much closer his own life is bound up socially — not morally, because he still despises them — with the villagers rather than with his former buddies, the soldiers. What interests me is how feelings of friendship, of love even, are born out of what in terms of ordinary values are morally depraved relationships. I also very much believe in a class-morality. But at the same time, I'm convinced that class-morality doesn't wholly define the moral stance of an individual. True, people are more defined by their class-morality than by their individual morality. For example, when he is a lorry-driver and making a living, the "Gaucho's" behaviour is very much that of his profession, but as circumstances make him slide down the social scale, a different moral behaviour appears. This, obviously, cuts both ways. One has to guard against a certain moral populism. One can't say that the rich are automatically evil and the poor are good, what one can say, however, is that the rich, given their position, have a greater opportunity and perhaps even tendency to do evil than those who are poor, and this is a fact of class, and not one of morality. But here we touch a theme which stands behind all this, and that is the question of power-relations, and how they develop unconsciously.

"OS FUZIS" (1963)

Is Os Fuzis *based on a historical incident, or how is one to take the subtitle "Nordeste, 1963"?*

The film was made in 1963, and that's what it primarily refers to. The history of the holy man and the bull lies back quite some time, it happened in 1924, and the bull was eventually killed not by the peasants, but by the army. Nonetheless, the situation does correspond fairly accurately to a certain streak of mysticism and superstition still very characteristic of the Nordeste today. And the holy man who accompanies the bull was a man who had a definite political influence in the region, a kind of rival to the local politicians, because he promised a miracle, namely that rain would come and end the drought. These droughts, of course, are notorious in the area, and I wanted very much to convey the idea that the circumstances and conditions depicted didn't refer to some historical situation, but belonged very much to the present.

The structure of Os Fuzis *is very carefully worked out. Did the idea of a parallel action develop during the actual shooting?*

No, this is the way I planned it from the start. In *Os Fuzis* I was particularly conscious of the importance of the narrative structure, I wanted to find a form where I could integrate material which has an almost documentary character.

The paralleled action, with its two radically different dramatic rhythms does in fact, when taken together, suggest a political consciousness arrived at dialectically by the implicit rapport between waiting for the miracle that never happens and waiting for the lorries that take away the stockpiled grain and thus the peasants' hope of escaping starvation.

Obviously I thought a lot about this and I tried to convey it mainly through the film's structure. I attach a great importance to the structure of a film, and I work very hard on it, since it carries an essential part of the film's signicance. I improvise a good deal on the set, depending on the decor, the material circumstances, the actors, and therefore I have to have a structure which is very solid and well worked out. Even though after the shooting I invariably consider

the whole material anew in the cutting room.

Together with Rosi's Salvatore Guiliano, Os Fuzis *is often mentioned as the model of a "political" film, in the sense of a "politicised intelligence". It is often said that a narrative film cannot embody a critical awareness, and yet* Os Fuzis *seems to possess an undoubtedly dialectical movement and is nonetheless quite linear in its structure.*

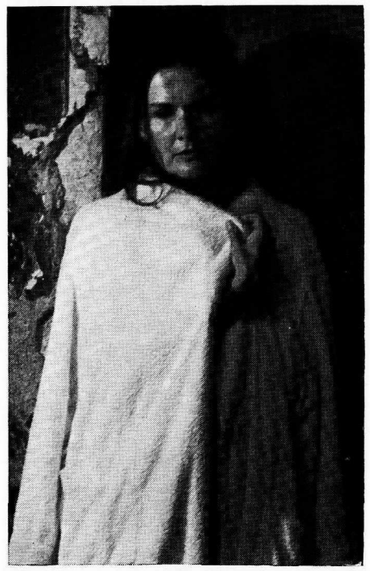
First of all, I'm always very flattered when people compare me with Rosi, because I think he is an absolutely first-rate director, though I haven't seen that many of his films. Secondly, I think the argument about the impossibility of the narrative form is often wrongly put. For example, when *Os Fuzis* was first shown in 1963 people thought it a very difficult film, they thought the narrative was terribly devious, complex and needlessly obscure. That's why it got into the cinemas only three or four years later. And yet the film today seems very clear, not to say simple. But at the time even I thought it was complex and complicated — the film really did cause me a lot of headaches. And because it was thought so obscure, I had a pretty serious disagreement with the producer. He wanted to cut out the buli altogether, and just leave the story of the "Gaucho" and the soldiers, make a straight action movie out of it, rather like a Western. It might have looked quite beautiful, but it didn't make sense to me anymore, there wouldn't have been any justification for making it, because the story of the soldiers and the village only takes on a significance in the context of the bull and vice versa. And for that reason the structure had to be linear and the form had to be narrative.

One often confuses in a film that which takes place in the character and that which the audience notices. It is not possible or even desirable that a character should have an awareness of a given situation which goes beyond what is psychologically or intellectually plausible. Or inversely, even if the character has, let's say, a fairly advanced understanding of the situation, this doesn't mean that the spectator can always follow. The action of the character gives rise to something, admittedly, but in the spectator maybe it evokes quite a different reaction. And that's, for example, what happened with most of the Italian neo-realist films, which show a really quite serious intellectual confusion. At the end of the film, there would always be a character who asserted that society was bound to change, whereas the spectator may not believe this at all, or at any rate have his doubts whether the guy in the film really knows what he is talking about. I always ask myself what is the rapport between the spectator and the character on the screen. I don't like characters who go beyond their own possibilities. If they do, they become false, and the emotional current between spectator and character is broken. In the case of *Os Fuzis* I did try to keep a certain political vision in mind, but its manifestations are necessarily complex and occasionally oblique.

In view of the ideological elements which make up a person's consciousness or psychology, what is your conception of "character" in a film?

I think there is a definite need to overcome a purely psychological cinema. I don't mean that there shouldn't be any account taken of what one might call the behavioural psychology of the characters. On the contrary, there is an emotion based on the psychological rapport between spectator and the characters, and this rapport must be respected. The character must exist, he must have a mind, a sensibility, reflexes which transmit a whole range of emotions, and those emotions one has to take account of.

"A film about dissatisfaction" . . . Sweet Hunters.

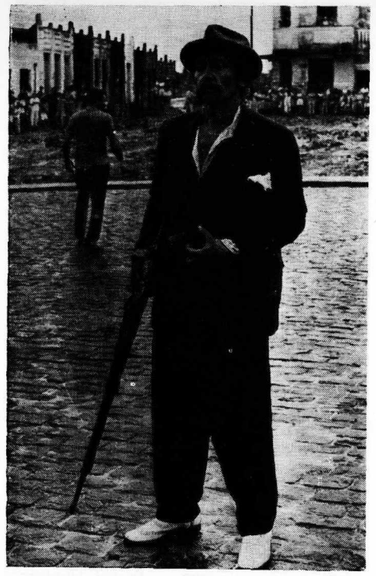


Ambiguous impulses . . . Sweet Hunters

What has to be questioned is the psychological interpretation of human structures and of society as a whole, which is too narrow and special an angle even when it comes to explaining certain specific and intimate human relationships. I try nonetheless to make my characters exist within a framework of psychological responses, that is, they can be accounted for psychologically in some measure, even if they cannot be interpreted and analysed fully within this framework. What is dangerous is to reduce all action to the level of individual psychology. In *Os Fuzis* the characters are psychologically complex, and yet it isn't a psychological film.

How do you see the signicance of the "Gaucho" in political terms, especially his act of revolt at the end?

It seems to me that the "Gaucho" in *Os Fuzis* is in the last analysis an example of false leadership. First of all, he doesn't belong to the masses, except under the conjunction of external circumstances, because from the moment he no longer has any money he has also run out of credit, and once he has lost credit he can't buy his drinks anymore, and it is at this point that he joins the masses, takes the side of the villagers, out of a sense of personal humiliation. But he isn't really someone who belongs to the people. Secondly, his revolt starts from a purely emotional gesture, he doesn't care whether the others might follow him or not, to be a real leader he would have to assume some kind of responsibility, and not just precede the villagers by a tiny step. That's why his gesture is a suicidal one, it's an act purely on the level of a moral conscience, so to speak, and not of revolutionary consciousness, and that's why he gets himself killed. At the time I was reproached for having given the film such a "negative" ending. People wanted to see the peasants follow the "Gaucho", take up arms, over-



The Gods and the Dead

turn the lorries, burn them, have a big shoot-out and so on. And I said, sure I'd like to see that too, but it has got to happen in reality, not in my film. Because in the film it isn't possible, it's false, given what the people are and the situation. That's how you get false revolutionary cinema, where things are shown on the screen which aren't possible or or not yet possible in real life. In a sense, too, such films are in danger of giving a false leadership.

On the face of it, Sweet Hunters *is a film very much concerned with "psychological" themes, the family, the more and more strained relationships between a bourgeois couple, their grown-up daughter on an isolated island. And yet, you have said that it isn't a psychological film. How do you see it?*

It isn't psychological for me in the sense that the characters do not communicate with each other, they don't try to comprehend each other on the purely psychological level. They all sense that what motivates them to act in the way they do lies deeper, they obscurely sense an unconscious charge that determines their attitudes and emotions. The woman, for example, without entirely being aware of it, follows a course, in her mind as well as in her actions, which converges and fuses with a whole network of cultural patterns whose existence within herself she had hardly suspected. She does things, she ritualizes her gestures without being aware of it, but in the last instance it's they that determine her as a human being. She goes further than the purely psychological, her impulses come from a deeper layer of her being. And in the case of Sterling Hayden the husband, it's rather similar. He is a man who has a theory about the migration of birds and is determined to prove it. But he comes to distrust somewhat his own motives and the utility of his theory, and therefore his behaviour is tinged with a certain irony towards himself and his situation, he consciously adopts certain values which he knows belong to the past. That's why I used the Orff score, to emphasize the irony, the humour, and at the same time the way he takes things over-seriously. In the end he is obliged to act in a very definite way, which wasn't at all what he initially intended, his plans for himself, his conception of himself had been rather different. He suddenly has to make the relationship with his wife more important than his theory about the birds.

Do you see it as a film about the bourgeoisie?

No. Not about the bourgeosie as such. It's a film about a bourgeois couple, true, but it's more a film about dissatisfaction — maybe about the kind of dissatisfaction that comes with being bourgeois? For me, it's ultimately a film about freedom — and love, or rather about the way these two things are connected. The couple are people who are enclosed in a bourgeois way of thinking, even on their island, outside their normal circumstances, and unconsciously, they are trying to break out, escape from their own situation. They are both deeply dissatisfied. He about his birds and the way he is not getting anywhere with his theory, and she is obsessed by an idea of love which she is not so much unable to realize physically — because she does eventually — but to make palpable, assume consciously and with conviction. So that the search for freedom joins that for love, but in this love there is a definite element of the vampire. Vampirism and love are closely allied for me, by the idea of blood, also destruction, even if it's something new that arises, it passes through a stage of destruction of which the woman in *Sweet Hunters* is very conscious. She uses the fugitive quite deliberately, she tries to possess him, and even though he rejects this, she makes him almost cruelly dependent on her. Her impulse is so strong that in a sense she couldn't care less whether she does is evil or not. Love in this film has a perfectly destructive side, and I wanted to bring out this egotism, which however isn't a moral one, it goes deeper.

I noticed that in your films people are always waiting, and the action is structured around the tension inherent in waiting. In Os Cafajestes *the two men are waiting at the fortifications for the girls to arrive, and you shoot the scene so that we feel their boredom as well as their restlessness. They are smoking, swallowing pep pills, wandering around, and all the time there is this tension, which is the more memorable for not being strictly "dramatic". In* Os Fuzis *the peasants are waiting for the rain and the soldiers for the lorries to arrive, and there the tension engendered by the two kinds of inactivity finally explodes in the "Gaucho" running amok. Finally, in* Sweet Hunters *the strain on the couple partly derives from the seemingly endless and to the wife also pointless waiting for the migrating birds to arrive. Is this in any way a personal theme, or do you use it as narrative device to produce this kind of potentially revealing tension?*

It's true, though I've so far never been quite conscious of it, that waiting plays an important role in my films. Individuals have quite different conceptions of time, the condition of waiting draws out the impulse towards changing life, or their situation, but I guess some people just wait in hope things do change of their own accord, and in this sense, the theme of waiting has a certain social basis, in that the people I'm most often concerned with in my films, large parts of their lives consist of waiting, there is a certain apathy which can suddenly erupt into violence. And maybe it has something to do with myself. Whatever the film one is making, whatever its subject — and even if one is making a so-called "political" film, say, like *Os Fuzis*, the themes one is treating are always pretty well the same, the same way of looking at the world, one's feeling for things and for people.

The imposed situation of waiting, then, seems very often to come into conflict with the inner drive of the characters to manifest themselves in action, so that there is a dialectic in such situations between the objective social and historical conditions which you portray (which may be contradictory to the point of appearing static) and the subjective "psychological" experience of it by the protagonists. Is this a conscious differentiation you are making there?

I think so. The waiting has to come from the action itself, from the overall situation, and this makes for a very sustained emotional charge which I try to mobilize in the characters.

"THE GODS AND THE DEAD" (1970)

Your films contain a very striking use of music, not only the score in Sweet Hunters, *but also the music in* The Gods and the Dead. *What role does music assume in your films?*

Music for me is never used descriptively, but rather figures as a character in his own right. This is particularly true of the Orff score which was written to be performed and therefore already contained a very visual element. Furthermore, Orff had done research on the rhythms, it's a very telluric music, very much tied to the earth and the soil, and in a sense very African, and we tried to put the music as a kind of chorus, which looks at the characters, it ironizes them a little, while at the same time showing concern for their fate. Hence the music intervenes in the action with a great deal of violence, not so much to underline things, but to open up a character, as it were, and to give the spectator another angle on him.

I was struck by the scene in The Gods and the Dead *when Othon Baston kills the piglet. As the knife goes down the music sets in and the effect is to take the film into a different register, change its level of significance, modulate the flow of the action while it continues visually.*

Yes, that is it. It is as if the film was all of a sudden changing colour or something like that. In *The Gods and the Dead* the music has again this function of a character, and except for one occasion, the music never terminates with the scene, but stops prior to it. This is because I always sense the need to get back into a more "natural" feel, in order to facilitate the change of scene or set-up. With music one is automatically in a more interior world. So the sequences always end on a "concrete" register, that is the physical action of the characters.

You seem to attribute a great importance to the rhythm of your films.

Yes. Partly because I have a great interest in music, partly because it's what gives a film its life. I work very intensively on the montage, at the same time very quickly, because I believe that the rhythm of work, i.e. the amount of time one takes over the cutting, will somehow be reflected in the film itself. If I give myself too much time, I come to posing myself false problems, and I often work 18 hours a day on the montage, so as to stay inside the film while I'm cutting it.

MISE-EN-SCENE

There is a certain fondness in your films of the straight line: a corridor, railway tracks, a deserted street which give your images an almost geometrical shape. Has this any larger, structuring significance?

I work very hard on the individual shot, in its graphic pictorial sense. An image for me is a surface and an extension, framing, getting the perspectival lines which has to be organized, by means of worked out and so on. This affects the use of decor in relation to the action. But at the same time, there is a rather intuitive element involved. I have to respond positively to the decor, the environment before I can do anything with it, I have to feel a certain pleasure, things have to fall into place, and only when somehow this feeling doesn't produce itself, then I start thinking. And then I notice, say, that the perspective isn't right, that the background is flat, when in fact it ought to have an opening somewhere out on to an exterior, or that there is depth when you want is an enclosed space, and that sort of consideration gets a lot of my time. Decor for me is an interior dimension which the action 'exteriorizes'. By his this I mean that the behaviour of a character manifests itself in concrete terms in the decor, even when he is immobile. And conversely, I use the decor in such a way that it achieves a maximum of rapport precisely with the 'psychology' of the characters, without thereby making this behaviour necessarily psychological.

In other words, your style, your mise-en-scene is a consequence of your themes, your dramatic intentions at any given point?

When I'm setting up a scene, there is a whole graphic pattern about the movements of the camera in relation to the action in my head. There are, so to speak, straight lines, twisted lines, crossed lines, tangents, curves, movements developing along one or several axes, so that both the action and the camera obey a certain graphic design. And this design results from the interaction of decor and character, locale and action.

I was very struck by the way you thematize the graphic elements in your films, for example, the way a straight line often corresponds to a certain impulse towards action, directed action, but then these lines also lose themselves on an indistinct horizon, as if this impulse towards efficient action was somehow annihilated by the vastness of the space surrounding it.

That's it.

You also seem to have a fairly pronounced preference for scenes where there is first a background, then a character enters the frame in the foreground from the side. What is the significance for you of this?

All my camera movements, except in very special cases, are **on** the characters, in other words, if there are two characters, the camera would never pass from one character to another through an empty space, the camera never has a life of its own, it's always linked either to a human field of vision or a movement. The camera always follows something. This concretizes and gives at every point a 'full' action — even in the dialogue passages. I'm very conscious of plastic values, of the value of space and matter. That's why I like to take my characters from very close and at the same time place them in a real context, I don't like to do a scene wholly in close-ups, because it gives a sense of abstraction which bores me. Of course, there are always exceptions for special cases, where such an abstraction is what one is looking for. My whole vision of things is to be very close to the characters and very close to the decor at the same time. Hence the fluctuations, the to and fro of the camera between long-shots and medium to close-ups. Also, speaking of the distribution of volume and mass, I often frame characters in outline, because I think shape and size can sometimes say more than a glance. You see, in this respect, I'm not at all psychological. I think a facial expression may tell the spectator less than, say, the outline of someone's shoulders.

Does this correspond in your opinion to two levels of the image — the level of presence and that of consciousness, as one finds it in certain American films, where the background, as it were, exteriories the characters' inner life?

Given that I always try to escape from individual psychology and to render an emotion, I'm inevitably obliged to think about how to portray the reflective dimension of a character. I very much like to accentuate an idea which happens inside the characters with something real in the exterior world which can render this idea in a direct and immediate manner. Giving the knife to somebody is giving him death and in *The Gods and the Dead I show* a dead guy in the corner of the room. This is concretizing an interior aspect. If I can find something in the decor which can give me that, be it a geometrical line, or a perspectival alignment, or an opening to a door, or on the level of colour, say I work with the red of the girl in *The Gods and the Dead*, then that's fine. I'm very rigorous on the level of the shooting script, I never make a camera-movement or shoot a shot which is simply descriptiv, for which I don't feel the inner necessity. That's why I never simply pan because that is what I would call descriptive. I only make camera-movements which are linked to a structure of thought.

You mentioned that you are interested in rendering emotion. It seems to me that the "emotion" you are interested in not only plays between the characters on the screen, but sometimes, even aggressively, between the film and the spectator. I'm thinking in particular of the scene in Os Cafajestes, *when the two characters drive endlessly in circles round the naked girl. The scene is particularly revealing, I think, because in a certain sense, it is almost a metaphor of the whole film; just as the car — and the camera — circle interminably round the girl prostrate on the ground, so the film seems to dig itself deeper and deeper into this situation of a pointless emotional violence which finds no issue in action. The scene seems quite deliberately to go on beyond its point of maximum dramatic or psychological impact, it becomes to the audience a kind of poignant anticlimax, which implicitly defines the mood of the rest of the film.*

I'm glad that the scene comes across like this, because I wanted that its primary connotation should be a physical one, and people at the first showing were in fact almost squirming in their seats, saying stop, stop, that's enough. But I wanted to translate the psychological significance

An "American" dynamic of violence.
The Gods and the Dead . . .

of the situation into actual duration.

There is one scene in Os Fuzis, *where I think this ambiguous physical involvement of the spectator conveys perfectly the contradictory nature of the experience portrayed. The scene I'm referring to is the love scene between Mario and the girl, and to me it's one of the most complex and at the same time "realistic" love scenes in the cinema. The girl, torn between the most violently conflicting feelings, driven along this barren corridor between two houses, feeling disgust at Mario's complicity with the casual murder of the shepherd, and yet also a strong physical attraction and an infinite need to have some human contact in her bleak world, the innate sense of class solidarity, of moral identification with her people, battling with the assertion of her emotional rights as an individual and woman, all this creates a powerful dialectic, which the film translates into movement and duration.*

I'm also very fond of this scene, I think it says precisely what it is intended to say. Obviously it's no accident that the episode takes place in the context of the wake for the old guy, with all the contradictions implicit in this wake.

BRAZIL AND THE CINEMA NOVO

Like so many other scenes in Os Fuzis *one gets a strong sense of how necessarily interrelated are the economic situation, military and political institutions, religion, the social and the sexual basis of power structures. The film as a whole seems to be saying that these are all 'values' that count in the progress and change in a given society.*

I don't think one can imagine a transformation of Brazil, either of society as a whole or in respect of personality structures, without for instance taking into account the religious and mystical factor. I, for one, am not a believer, I'm an atheist and I've never had a religious crisis in my life. Nonetheless there is definitely a mystical streak in my nature, because I'm fascinated by what goes on on the level of non-rational cognition, and I'm very attracted by magic and the whole spectrum of values associated with it. Ordinarily, these values are narrowed and reduced by organized religion, for in actual fact the manifestations of religious knowledge are much more diversified. The Brazilians have a religion, a black, 'tropical' religion, and it is still deeply embedded in Brazilian society, even in the upper bourgeoisie. It implies a way of seeing things which one might call intuitive, but which I prefer to regard as part of the unconscious, the unconscious of the people. Obviously, in the unconscious of the Brazilian people, the mystical coordinate so to speak is very powerful and it's also the impulse that is most immediately present.

This may be one of the reasons why our films are occasionally rather difficult ,because we often make films which do not solely start from rational events, but from the collective unconscious. Of course, this collective unconscious is very difficult to grasp and even more difficult to represent — it manifests itself in things that seem arbitrary or that lend themselves to different interpretations. From a certain perspective, our films seem a little hazy, but that is also their richness. They are rich, but at the same time a bit out of focus, as it were.

What has struck me about a number of Brazilian films I have seen is that they are very much concerned with bringing out a sense of vitality, an almost visceral optimism in the characters — but which doesn't easily find an adequate cinematic expression. To me it is often indistinguishable from rather theatrical hamming. In your own films this sense of a sustained inner dynamic appears far more integrated cinematically, an element of the mise-en-scene and the overall structure, rather than as something directly transmitted by the play of the actors and gestural historionics.

In some ways I proceed in an inverse manner from that practised by most other Brazilian film-makers. They normally have their script written and then proceed to find a suitable location. I personally can't even start to write a scene until I have already found the setting. A scene exists to me — prior to finding the location — only on the level of the theme, everything else develops from the concrete setting. Dialogues change, gestures and movements change according to whether a scene takes place in a bathroom or the living room, because after all, in a film it is the actual material presence which shaps the rest, including the words.

One of the things which must change when Brazilian films are shown abroad is the nature of the communication between film and audience. There is, apart from a different gestural language also a different rhythm, often a rather languid one, which tends to go against the grain of conventionalized cinematic expectations. Are there other than temperamental reasons for this?

It is difficult for me to answer this, but I think it comes both from a different conception of the cinema, i.e. a deliberate protest against certain forms of cinematic discourse and from a different idea of the rhythm of life itself.

When you make your films, have you a very clear idea of the expectations which the public will bring to the film?

When I started making films, I said to myself — up to the fifth film you'll experiment and after that it's for real. I still think this is somehow true. There has to be a kind of personal research, there are things one has to get out of one's system. So far, I have always made the kind of film I wanted to make and in the manner in which I wanted to make it. Even if this manner of working has proven to be very costly for me. I have always stuck to it nonetheless because filming gives me an enormous pleasure, and I'd very much like to leave it that way and not turn it into a professional chore. Right now I feel that I have acquired a cinematic language which belongs to me in that it conveys efficiently what I want it to express. Also, I now know the technicians and the crew with whom I can work in this direction, which is very important. In other words, I feel I have the human material and a lived experience that allows me to make films the way I want.

I'd like to believe that I can now make a film which on the level of communication with the spectator goes a lot further than my previous films. The language I have used hitherto has been somewhat oblique in relation to the public, though the public after all is beginning to become far more receptive and capable of understanding this kind of language. Even so, the element of direct communication is very important, and I'm conscious that before one can say things, one first has to come to terms with the ways of getting them across. In the last instance, however, it's a personal language that gives conviction to what one says, even if it is borrowed from a whole range of cinematic idioms. There has to come a moment where after having swallowed it all, one vomits out what one cannot digest and absorb. I think I have reached this point now, and I can make a more direct cinema. What I like is a cinema of action, even if it is a character alone in a room — that still can be made into an action film. I think it was Kobayashi who said when someone asked him what his favourite project was: a four-hour film about a man sitting by the river thinking. And I'm sure one could make a film of great action out of this. So that is what I think I'm going in the direction of a greater dialogue with the public.

Presumably the Brazilian public, like any other public, is rather habituated to the Hollywood cinema?

That's for sure. Mind you, on a certain level, the Brazilian public has other keys of comprehension and communication as well, but nonetheless it remains equivalent to the 'international' public created by Hollywood. As far as I am concerned, I have certainly been influenced by this tradition to some extent, especially the films of the 'thirties and 'forties, which was really an astonishing period. When I went to the movies in South America, naturally it was mostly Hollywood films, and what I learned was a certain efficaciousness on the primary level of characterization, a certain economy in the dramatic narrative, a great justness of tone... all the vitality of a cinema of action — and these are things that the Americans seem to be losing under the influence of the European cinema. The great names of the 'thirties, say Walsh or King Vidor ,these were directors who had a sense for the natural qualities of the decor and the material — and that is what they embodied in their narrative. There is something else (I'm currently trying to re-see some of the movies of that period) which strikes me very forcibly. Normally one thinks of the American cinema as given over entirely to action, but as a matter of fact, these films are often based very much on the spoken word, and the mise-en-scene is so dynamic that it virtually absorbs the word, so that even in the most verbal scenes,

. . . .and King Vidor's Ruby Gentry

one's feeling is that of a very sustained and continuous action. There is no doubt that this cinema not only has a very strong appeal for me, it has also to a considerable extent formed me as a film-maker.

I think the sense of a sustained and at the same time carefully controlled inner dynamism is what communicates strongly in your own films, even more, as in The Gods and the Dead, *because of the language problem, a lot of the plot escaped me. One immediately feels that what is happening is important, not because it might be symbolic of something, but because it creates a field of energy to which the whole composition and the setting responds. Maybe this electrifying quality partly reflects your interest in the relations of power and the psychological rapports of force between individuals, and of course there is also the strong erotic undercurrent in your films. At times in* Os Cafajestes, *especially in the night scenes on the beach, I was somehow reminded of Dorothy Malone in a film by Douglas Sirk . . .*

. . . oh yes, the one with the stunt-fliers. And there is another one, with the same actors, in colour, a magnificent film — *Written on the Wind*. When *Cahiers* reviewed *Os Cafajestes* at the time, they compared it to Vidor, and they mentioned *Ruby Gentry*, which isn't altogether off the mark, since *Ruby Gentry* is a film I like a lot, the way it is constructed like a musical score round the piece played by Walter Brennan on the harmonica. And then the scene of Jennifer Jones and Heston in the car — it's the kind of love I was aiming at in *Os Cafajestes*.

Do you see a conflict between your interest in 'political' cinema and your love for the cinema of action?

The misunderstanding about 'political' cinema comes, I believe, from a 'symbolic' conception of hero and action, whereas the real problem for a film maker is to do his political thinking by way of perceiving inherently cinematic material politically. In this sense, the American cinema is in fact 'materialist' — even it from an ideological point of view it is a very debatable cinema. A director as 'reactionary' as, say Ford, on the level of his cinematic language, his portrayal of human relationships, in the justness of his treatment of the material, he is a 'materialist'.

In some of Glauber Rocha's films one finds that the rapport between the characters themselves, and the logic of the action, too, are structured according to ideological or anthropological categories of analysis, which for me, at any rate, leave the films paradoxically (given the director's manifest political involvement) quite non-committal.

I'm convinced that what is important in the cinema is the emotion in the spectator. It's part of the film-maker's material. And emotion, for the majority of the public, cannot be given politically, not in a pure state. Intellectual understanding is no substitute for emotional comprehension. However, in a film like *The Lion Has Seven Heads* I find that the 'political emotion' so to speak, has a direct echo in me, but I can well see that a lot of people are not susceptible along this spectrum of values and responses.

What are the conditions, at present, under which the Cinema Nôvo directors can work in Brazil?

In view of the rapid development of the Brazilian film industry in recent years, with something like 120 feature films being made each year, there is now considerable aid being given to the cinema from official sources, but this aid is channelled above all into entertainment films for home consumption. On the other hand, the money is fairly intelligently distributed, so that we, the directors usually grouped as Cinema Nôvo (though this is by now merely a historical label), who after all have a certain reputation both at home and abroad — which is very valuable for the Brazilian government — have access to funds, in spite of the fact that our work is none too kindly viewed by the authorities for what we say about Brazil and the image we give of it. This leaves us a somewhat ambiguous freedom, especially since the money is merely advanced. It has to be re-paid, and if we can't find distribution or we are having trouble with the censor, then the credits can be stopped and pressure be put on us. So there is a definite economic censorship on top of the political one which limits one's room for manoeuvre. But so far there have always been ways of overcoming this, and as long as we can, we carry on.

Jennifer Jones and Charlton Heston: Ruby Gentry.

Book Review

"GODARD ON GODARD": translation and commentary by Tom Milne. Cinema Two (S & W Paperback £1.90)

"Il est difficile, sans ne dire par impossible, de pousser loin la pratique sans la spéculation, et reciproquement de bien posséder la spéculation sans la pratique" Diderot; *L'Encyclopedie.*

"Any great modern film which is successful is so because of a misunderstanding" Jean-Luc Godard; *Cahiers du Cinema* 171.

Firstly, it is necessary to applaud Tom Milne for his brave translation of Godard's sometimes impossible idiosyncracies; for those who do not read French, this highly-priced paperback is essential for an understanding of the director's work at least until 1967 — a period as misunderstood as the present 'political' phase is maligned. Milne's commentary is often excellent in its painstaking research into the more accessible of the throwaway references, and the stills have evidently been chosen with immense care to reflect a wholesale immersion in an unlimited cinematic tradition. Altogether, *Godard on Godard* stands as a monument to creative fertility among the phantom pregnancies of current cinema journalism; as such, it is the responsibility of the critic to understand Godard's writings as the prelude to the comprehension of the work of the most important single talent to emerge in the cinema since the Second World War.

An altogether crucial function of *Godard on Godard* will be its inevitable confrontation with the squeamish over the importance of the American Cinema in the context of the art itself, a subject always treated by the Anglo-Saxon critical establishment in a manner similar to the custom of the director William Dieterle when on the set — that is, with the obsessive delicacy of white kid gloves (and even Richard Roud, in his introduction to Milne's edition, still speaks of Godard's admiration for Frank Tashlin with an effete 'alas', as if in a final effort to restrict that admiration to an intellectual association on the level of an in-joke). Certainly Godard's often reckless aphorisms, spiced with the humour and punning wit reminiscent of the world of Parisian journalism portrayed by Balzac in *Illusions Perdues,* may at times arouse the sceptic; for example in his panegyric of Ray's *Bitter Victory* (pp. 64–6), an article more emotive than analytical, or his short piece on Fuller's *Forty Guns* (pp. 61–2), which nevertheless reveals more of that masterpiece's apocalyptic spirit than a longer more detailed appreciation. No, the importance of Hollywood to Godard is intrinsically related to the dichotomy that informs both his criticism and his films, the relation of a polished narrative cinema, and indeed all cinema, to what one must abstractedly call 'Truth', the extent to which the considered veneer of style dictates the reality that the camera reveals, the problem of whether the truth of that really is abstract, or whether truth is not 'the' vision, but 'a' vision, in other words a perception. His flexible attitude to this efficacy of style and interpretation can be traced from early pieces in *La Gazette du Cinema* to the compact pronouncements of the years with *Cahiers.* And whether Richard Roud likes it or not, among Godard's chosen test-areas for this dichotomy was the world of American Comedy, with its crackling dialogue and its cracking pace, its brittle flashy packaging, whether vulgar (Tashlin), or urbane (Blake Edwards).

The idealism of Godard's early criticism is always tempered by the perverse awareness of the enchantment to which he submitted under the spell of the cinema. Indeed, his awareness leads him to castigate the pseudo-objectivity of an art-documentary (pp. 19–20) and, in an important though abstract review of Maté's *No Sad Songs for Me,* to articulate a paradox out of the problems which haunted him. Of the cinema he writes that while it is "an art of representation, all it knows of interior life are the precise and natural movements of well-trained actors" (p. 22). It is his admiration for sophistication and facility, as well as the awareness of the manipulation behind the veil of 'objectivity', that provokes Godard's intense sympathy for the early films of Mankiewicz and Preminger; what justifies the classically-constructed scripts of these films, for him, is the acute psychological penetration their technique of dramatic selection engendered, the delicate equilibrium between decorum and contingency, their "cunning and precise paraphrase" of reality (p. 28). In his review of Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train,* Godard is honest enough to demonstrate this primary justification via an expression of sentimental idealism which is attracted to a cinema of mythical status attained by technical expertise ("genius battening on objects") through a shying away from the stark contingency of the real world (p. 24). In a later, remarkable analysis of another Hitchcock film, *The Wrong Man* (pp. 48–55), he expands this by noting the director's ability to incorporate digression (Balastero reading a newspaper in the subway on his way home from work) within the texture of integrated plot, thus bestowing meaning on the individual moment and giving life the style it lacks; for, as we know, the equilibrium of the thriller or the detective story lies in the subtle transmutation of the apparently peripheral detail. For Godard then, submission to the 'tyranny' of the classical director (and simultaneous awareness and even rejoicing in that tyranny) create a dialectic which investigates the nature of cinematic motivation; "to direct means to scheme and one says of a scheme that it is well or badly mounted" (p. 40). In his early years, Godard is intrigued by traditional cinematic notions of content (charm of the narrative, formulation, pace) i.e. the question of what one may justifiably 'put in' a movie. By 1965 and *Pierrot Le Fou,* he is immersed in the allegiance of narrative, what it conceals rather than reveals.

Made in USA.

If Godard's criticism is always idiosyncratic, it is representative of French critical debate in that its questions — the status of the director, validity of narrative discourse etc. — are formulated in relation to the American Cinema, and the values Hollywood consciously or otherwise imposed in other national film industries. While it is only comparatively recently that English criticism has focussed on Hollywood, it is ironic that this criticism seems nevertheless to have missed the point of Godard's analytical aphorisms. Currently fashionable interpretations of the work of Howard Hawks, whom Godard considered the finest American director, bear witness to this. Here criticism depends on employing the impartiality of this director's perception as a jemmy to force an interpretation working backwards from overt content — a sinister schematisation of'adventure films and comedies which can only apparently be understood as mutual inverses; style becomes the vehicle of a stoic world-vision. Godard too recognises this impartiality; but by contrast he is solely interested in investigating the efficacy of its creative expression, the 'plan américain' or medium waist-shot (the French phrase indicates the indigenous nature of this spatial pattern, forged by the physical-gestural relation of characters in the frame favoured by American sound Comedy). He conducts this by substituting for a classically-constructed script a disconcerting visual continuum which is due to a rigorously consistent mise-en-scene and based entirely on this kind of shot (c.f. *Made in USA*). Thus the only link between *Made in USA* and Hawks' *The Big Sleep* which Godard acknowledges as the inspiration for his own film, is not the increased sense of the stoic ethic resigned to a labyrinthine, morally negligible world, but the interrogatory-analytical force of the 'plan américain' (the framing, radical not formal, of characters in space) after its liberation from the exigencies of classical narrative, transposed to an area of surfaces and appearances, zones of ambiguity. Godard expresses no interest in a conception of Hawks' stoicism, and *Scarface* does not intrigue him because it contains under a vicious narrative of gangsterism the essential paradigm of a Hawksian comedy; he wishes to experiment with the viability of classical style (constructed for a certain purpose, operating within certain limits and in this sense 'coded') against shifting contexts. In this way, Godard is employing a means of articulating one reality as a tool, to anatomise another, he is decomposing 'style', a concept of 'multiple diegesis' more elementary than that outlined by P. Wollen in a recent article on the director (*Afterimage,* Autumn 1972, pp. 7–16). Once Godard praised Vadim for envisaging a dramatic idea in *Et Dieu Créa la Femme* and then transposing it simply and logically according to viewpoint and emphasis onto the screen; in his own films he reverses this process in which the cinema no longer reveals by morally justifiable selectivity but creates its own spontaneous "correspondences".

For Godard then, any radical representation of reality (moral, political) in the cinema must absorb the codifications of the past. In two early articles, "Défence et Illustration du Découpage Classique" (pp. 26–30) and "Montage Mon Beau Souci" (pp. 39–41), he adds a perverse, but important distinction to the axioms of Eisenstein and Bazin in this respect. He is not impressed with the latter's simplistic claims for the development of deep-focus that "the spectator's relationship with the image is nearer to that which he has with the reality"; his view of the means at the disposal of a director is more inclusive. Composition in depth gives a concision to considered dramatic effect by reducing relations between people and objects to single shot, but 'manipulation' of response (or, to put it differently, creation of meaning) is no less apparent, or more real, than with montage. An example from a film Godard reviewed for *Cahiers* bears this out; I mean *Strangers on a Train,* when Senator Morton and his family await Guy's telephone call to tell them that he has been cleared from suspicion of his wife's murder. Hitchcock shows us the telephone in the foreground of the frame, in close-up, with the family seated together in the background; the meaning of the shot, the power of what the object symbolises (vindication of happiness, good name etc.), is as obvious as under the sequential association of editing. The difference lies in sheer context; Hitchcock chooses it precisely because of the comparative primacy of the inert object in relation to the future of the characters, example of an ironic relationship (cf. the cigarette-lighter) permeating the film, and an effect that would have been lost in consecutive shots of telephone and anxious expressions as there is more at stake than merely a temporary connection. A similar example may be extracted from *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?,* where Aldrich, in constructing a maximal suspense effect, demonstrates Joan Crawford's dependence on reaching the telephone while Bette Davis is out of the house by alternately distorting the relationship between object (foreground) and helpless cripple (background) through low-angle camera set-ups dictating relief, and cutting from a slow zoom-in on the one with a static medium shot of the other. The title of the first of the two articles mentioned above is a deliberate hommage on Godard's part to the famous tract on the French language by Joachim du Bellay, member of the celebrated 'Pléiade' of the 16th Century, who advocated all forms of linguistic experiment consciously thought out and justifiable, a flexibility outriding dogma. Their word for such experimentation was 'provignement', grafting-on of technique and effect by such heretically undisciplined methods as analogy. It is a spirit to which Godard remains faithful, citing as his master Renoir, especially in the artful simplicity of his films of the 'thirties. Nevertheless the creative debate engendered here is perhaps more obscured than illuminated by the red-herring of his fiction-documentary terminology (analysed with particular reference to short films and again Malraux p. 132), making a point through the confusion of accepted modes.

Preoccupied with the relationship of image and reality, Godard is also concerned that one method of conveyance is not considered necessarily more real than another, in the same way that editing and camera-movement are not mutually exclusive. But Godard through his paradoxes points the way towards a reversal of the accepted belief about the value of composition in depth. Welles' conception of relief is dramatic rather than realistic for deep-focus heightens existing relationships inside the frame rather than leaving the spectator free to make his own connections; thus Quinlan's conversation with the Night Man

Howard Hawks' The Big Sleep

outside the motel in *Touch of Evil* is demonstration of 'poetic' space, rather than apeing the verisimilitude of an ordinary encounter. Exaggerated dramatic relief is a vehicle for Welles' parabolic imagination in the same way as montage heralds Eisenstein's emotive didacticism. The root of Bazin's sentimental concept of objectivity lies elsewhere, precisely where Godard had remarked on it — the 'plan américain', stylistic feature of American Comedy and hallmark of Hollywood's school of disciplined classicism (Hawks, Henry King etc.). With the value of a fluid detachment for rigorous adherence to the action, the 'plan américain' emphasised the crucial revelatory role of the cinema, "an instrument for discovering the world" as Rohmer puts it, discovering it through the only means at its disposal, the penetration of external appearances. Too often, the term 'realism' means the accumulation of detail within the spectacle, to further the pretence of verisimilitude; a director like Stroheim is mentioned in this context. Stroheim's films are realistic, but here the moral of superficial realism asserts itself, in the belief that the reality behind the spectacle will finally become apparent. *Foolish Wives* eschews camera-movement, as well as the rapid assertion of montage; but through the static medium shot, the motivations of the characters are discovered by the camera (a brief, typically eccentric example; the episode of the ex-soldier with no arms, which begins as a macabre accumulative gag and ends as a metaphor in which Stroheim's method may be glimpsed). And this simultaneous detachment from and submission to the exigencies of the action is, as Godard recognised, the true heritage of the American Cinema, and therefore the crucial stylistic element in the most influential segment of the narrative cinema as we know it; in other words, the most consistent arbiter of reality the art had produced at the time of Godard's investigation. The invention of Cinemascope is of course a fortuitous but somehow inevitable successor to the camera-eye embodied in the 'plan américain', confirming the relevatory aspect of the cinema by proving inimical to decomposing the spectacle into separate elements and thus rupturing an accumulated decorum.

Ultimately then, for Godard, criticism and films are related means of analysing the problematic relation between the camera and the objects that it films. In a short review of Burgess Meredith's *Works of Calder*, he writes that the cinema "consists simply in putting things in front of the camera". (p. 19). Later, when considering *Bitter Victory*, he writes that "one is no longer interested in objects but what lies between the objects and which becomes an object in its turn" an idea to be considered in *Pierrot Le Fou* eight years later. One of the ways that the change thus indicated can be seen is in a less elementary approach to characterisaton, an approach whch is the reverse of Hollywood's where identity is posited and cemented in combined trajectories which can negate individual elements (cf. the traditional 'peripeteia' of the American Cinema's morality of individualism). Godard dissects the architecture of cinematic characterisation by replacing the narrative continuum with one that is merely visual, enabling him to describe subjective and even negative properties (*Une Femme Mariée, Made In USA)*, dissolving the link of the images to a given dramatic context. *Made in USA* has been reduced by baffled critics to a chaotic in-joke, incited by apparently random quotation by Godard of Hollywood's mythical nomenclature. The character of Paula (Anna Karina), whose exploits the film purports to follow, is constantly being redefined by the environment in which she finds herself, by the correspondences Godard elicits through the relation of objects and personnel. No one image defines her; lying on a hotel bed reading a 'série noire' novel, leaning against a wall stuck with torn posters, watching her reflection in a pool — these images, stripped of a rigid plastic sense instead allow the audience to watch a character in construction. Here the decorum of continuity is peeled off by the logic of farce (the simultaneous confessions of Paula and Widmark, the 'choices' of death offered to Typhus and Donald, the combination of "Walt Disney plus blood"). Godard is reversing the method of his masters (the film is dedicated to Fuller and Nick Ray); for in the classical cinema, life is codified (condensed in narrative) and expressed in familiar visual 'forms' (the movements of celebrated actors, paradigms of genre etc). After primary identification of these forms, Godard reduces them to iconographic elements (elements of a manipulated imaginative universe) and isolates them, stripping them of their traditional context and informing them with separate resonances. The screen becomes an arena of visual conflict under the aegis of a colour movie in bright sunlight, chaos the fulcrum for a reassessment of the image-sound relationship; in *Made in USA* the characters search for equilibrium through dialogue — the absurd conversation in the café, Karina's statement of responsibility shot in three 'objective' close-ups (two profile, one head-on), the oblique coda of the closing conversation — while acknowledging the fluidity of the visual continuum via the 'plan américain' design (we recall what Godard writes of the main characteristics of this type of shot; "the extreme disquiet, the inner agitation, in a word... confusion"). This identification-interrogation of visual forms (what the image has become rather than what it is) is traditionally the province of the satirist; perhaps the fact that the debate is here linked so strongly to the director's punning elliptical humour explains the lack of response to the film.

The vindication of Godard's method up to 1967 comes in the image of the coffee-cup surface in *Deux ou Trois Choses Que Je Sais D'Elle*, a poetic image of the universe that unites him more completely with the director of *Rebel Without A Cause* than if he had wallowed in a cinema of reactionary spirit inviting him to endless remakes of *Johnny Guitar*. Godard's rebellion against established forms has been justified by time; the moral linearity which was the mainstay of the classical narrative cinema is now only to be found in debased 'camp' form (*Star Trek*, "Marvel" Comics). He should be allowed the last word: "Filming... is simply seizing an event as a sign, and seizing it at the precise second when gently (a scene from *Lola*), brutally (a shot by Fuller), cunningly (a composition by Bunuel), logically (a sequence from *Voyage to Italy*), the significance springs freely from the sign which conditions and prefigures it".

Peter Lloyd

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